Cuts Unscene: Hannibal, Season 2

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Cuts Unscene: Hannibal, Season 2

by DBMars

Summary

What if Will and Hannibal had been intimate all along, beginning with the pilot episode? I set out to answer that question. Cuts Unscene is the result.
In this companion fic to your next re-watch, Will and Hannibal have an intimate interaction in every episode that builds their romantic connection, operating on the concept that they were actual scenes cut from the original episodes -- canon compliant as possible!
For an optimal experience, watch the episode, then pause it at the indicated timestamp and read the "deleted scene" before pressing play again.
This series also includes SEASON 4 IN CUBA!

“Beautiful killer, I wonder at what you have become."

Notes

Season 2, Episode 1: Kaiseki

Companion song: “Hurts Like Hell” – Fleurie

“I loved, and I loved and I lost you
I loved, and I loved and I lost you
I loved, and I loved and I lost you
And it hurts like hell
Yeah, it hurts like hell
Dreams fight with machines
Inside my head like adversaries
Come wrestle me free
Clean from the war
Your heart fits like a key
Into the lock on the wall
I turn it
I turn it
But I can't escape
I turn it over
I turn it over
I loved, and I loved and I lost you
I loved, and I loved and I lost you

I loved, and I loved and I lost you
And it hurts like hell”

Hannibal has successfully framed Will for multiple murders, including Abigal Hobbs’. Will’s encephalitis has been treated, but he’s being held in Dr. Chilton’s madhouse awaiting his trial. Chilton tries to have a therapy session with him, but Will just disassociates and then asks to see Hannibal. Hannibal tells Bedelia in session that Will has been asking for him. She advises him not to go visit. She calls Hannibal out on his psychological manipulation of Will, and says Will is trying to manipulate Hannibal in return. Regardless, Hannibal does go to see Will in his cell. Will tells him he knows Hannibal framed him, and that there will be a reckoning, to which Hannibal says, “I have huge faith in you, Will. I always have.” This scene happens the next morning after Hannibal’s visit.

Season 2 Episode 1: Kaiseki

Will got to his feet and paced the cell, his muscles wound tight with agitation. He counted the steps from one end to the other, then circled back again. Every inch of his skin felt hot, prickly, and the scratchy jumpsuit he was forced to wear was no help whatsoever. Fury pulsed through him, and he pressed his nails into his palms, hard enough that they left angry weals in their wake.

I miss the brain inflammation, he thought bitterly. *Made the time go quicker.*

Will stopped in his tracks and rested his forehead against the cold metal of the cell's bars. "Fuck," he whispered through gritted teeth. His inner monologue, his own private voice, the part of his mind that talked to him… sounded like *Hannibal fucking Lecter* . The accent, the patterns of speech, everything. Yet it spoke in the first person, as if they were one in the same. Will's thoughts as if uttered from Hannibal's lips.

Will knew isolation. He knew how to brave loneliness. He could survive this. He just needed to escape into his imagination. It had served him well enough since he'd been transferred to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane after undergoing his hospital treatments. Sinking onto the lumpy rectangle of material that served as his mattress, he lay back and closed his eyes.

He called the images forth from memory. The babbling stream, an expanse of crystalline water, gushed around him. Will imagined himself casting the line out, drawing it back again, sucking in lungfuls of pristine morning air, a solitary, patient angler. Will's mind and body relaxed in increments as he transported himself back to that favorite fishing spot.

The constant rush of the water dulled, quieted, losing its sparkling clarity and mellowing in his mind. The sound became the patter of rain against a car windshield. And then Will was back in Hannibal's Bentley, forehead pressed against the cool window glass as Hannibal drove them to Minnesota. A seventeen hour drive. He'd slept through a good portion of it, but there had been pit stops at gas stations. He vaguely remembered stumbling into a Quik Trip bathroom with the gun tucked in his belt, Hannibal nowhere in sight. If he'd wanted to, Hannibal could have escaped at any time, called the authorities or simply driven away.

And miss the last act of such a well-written piece of theatre? Why walk away before the dramatic conclusion?

"Shut up," he whispered inaudibly, pressing his knuckles to his temple. Hannibal's constant presence in his mind felt like a repeated violation every time he heard it, salt in the wound. But trying to drive it away not only made his head ache, but the still-healing bullet wound in his shoulder flared up as if taking the hand of a dancing partner.

Perhaps you didn't come here looking for a killer. Perhaps you came here to find yourself. You killed a man in this very room.

Will still wasn't sure what Hannibal had wanted him to see at that moment. But a flicker of understanding threatened to become a flame somewhere deep in the shadows of his unconsciousness.

...your becoming.

He had no memory of Hannibal ever saying those words to him, but they rang with certainty as they bounced from one side of his head to the other, a relentless echo. But what Will saw in that blood-soaked kitchen, what buried him in a landslide of understanding, was who *Hannibal* really was. A murderer.

Not just that. Will, whether he liked it or not, was at a point where he could forgive certain kinds of life-taking. Understand them, at the very least. But Hannibal hadn't just snuffed out other human beings. He did so deliberately, with cold, exact calculation, planning every step in advance. Those acts were a far cry from shooting a man who had just slit his daughter's throat. And worse, he was going to ruin Will's life, forcing him to take the fall, destroying his existence in slow decay. Didn't care enough to end it quickly – Hannibal was perfectly fine with Will suffering, wasting away in a cell until he was old and gray for crimes he didn't commit. That was a very specific type of cruelty.

No, they weren't the same. They *weren't* .

If you followed the urges you kept down for so long, cultivated them as the inspiration they are, you would have become someone other than yourself.

Will opened his eyes with a sigh of frustration. He put his arms behind his head and stared at the dingy ceiling, watching a centipede crawl from one crevice to another. This time, he let Hannibal's words reverberate through his mind as many times as they pleased, trying to tease out their meaning.

At a time when other men fear their isolation, yours has become understandable to you. You are alone, because you are unique.

"I'm as alone as you are," Will whispered to the dark corners of his cell.

I'm as alone as you are.

But they weren't alone, not in that moment. They stood together in that gore-stained kitchen where each of them had taken a life, Garret Jacob Hobbs and Abigail, both ended in that heart of the home, where the daily bread was placed on the family table.

Cultivated them as the inspiration they are.

"Cultivated," he said softly, not unaware that he was talking to himself in his cell in a mental institution. He certainly fit the role Hannibal had cast him into.

Cultivated. Tended, like Stammets and his mushroom garden. Grown with loving care. Becoming something new, connected by an organic network that mimicked a brain.

Hannibal wanted him to kill Garret Jacob Hobbs.

Hannibal wanted him to *see* .

I want you to see me.

Wind him up and watch him go.

He thought back to their afternoon at the Rawlings Conservatory. Butterflies. Hannibal had helped him build his chrysalis, but it was up to Will to break out of it. To learn to fly.

Say what you will about Hell – at least it isn't lonely.

When Lucifer fell, he fell with his comrades. He was never alone.

Will pressed his fingers into his eyes and clamped the heels of his hands over his mouth to stifle the sound that threatened to break through. If he screamed, he wouldn't be able to stop.

Hannibal had wanted Will to become like him. Then they could have shared *everything.*

I thought we already had, Will thought miserably, only aware at the last second that his thoughts were still in Hannibal's voice.

But if that were true, if Hannibal had been grooming him, why frame him? Why ensure he'd rot in a cell for the rest of his life? It seemed, if anything, like a colossal waste of time.

"Mr. Graham?"

Will sat up like a shot. Two orderlies in white coats stood at his cell door. It was Ed, the tall one with glasses, and Sully, the skinny one with the long nose. They hadn't been introduced, of course, but Will had heard them talking to one another, and inferred their names based on some snatches of conversation from other staff.

"You have an appointment," Ed told him, removing his keys from his belt.

"It's, ah, early, isn't it?" He hadn't even had breakfast yet. Now that his encephalitis was cured, Will was able to gauge time much more effectively.

"Approach the door," Ed said in his flat drawl. Will obeyed, and compiled when given a straitjacket and asked to put it on.

Your comment about the poor man's straitjacket has inspired an idea.

Will shoved the images of what had happened that night away from his mind's eye so fast it gave him mental motion sickness. He could hear the soft breathing of the stag as if it stood right over his shoulder, little huffs and snorts.

"Turn around and face the wall."

Will did as he was told, half-expecting to see the nightmare creature when he did so. There was nothing but the pockmarked surface of the wall he'd already memorized. The door opened behind him, and the orderlies entered. One of them roughly positioned his arms and

buckled the straps of the straightjacket behind his back, then turned him around. Sully was holding a two-wheeled cart, like something used to move stacks of boxes. The difference was that it was covered with rubber padding, and had straps and clasps attached.

“This is Jolene.” Sully motioned to the contraption. “Get it? Because it’s a dolly.”

Will just gave him a withering glance.

“You’re gonna stand here.” Sully pointed to the bottom of the dolly. “We strap you in, and there you go.” He enunciated every word deliberately, like he was talking to a small child. “Save you some walking. Got it?”

Will kept staring at him, contempt bubbling under his jaw. “I’m insane, not deaf,” he muttered.

“Stand on the platform, please, Mr. Graham,” Ed requested, with an air of civility that thinly covered his contempt. Will begrudgingly obeyed, and let them strap him down. The final indignity was the bite mask Sully lowered over Will’s head and tightened to the point of discomfort. His stomach lurched as Ed tipped him backward and rolled him out of the cell. Sully opened the gate at the end of the cell block and they wheeled through a few dungeon-like hallways Will hadn’t seen before. One room they passed was labeled “laundry,” and another “boiler.” At last, they came to the end of a hallway and found what appeared to be a freight style maintenance elevator. Sully unlocked the gate and shoved it open. Ed wheeled Will inside, turning him to face the gate, before leaving the elevator and shutting it behind him.

“What the hell?” Will tried to say under the mask, but it came out muffled.

“Look at the time!” Sully pointed to his watch. “It’s our union-mandated break. You know how it is.”

“We’ll be right back, Mr. Graham.” Ed pushed a button on the wall, and the elevator descended with the screeching of rusty cables and several lurches that made Will’s stomach twist and writhe like one of the ward’s many centipedes. Panic urged him to breathe hard, fast, and his breath rasped through the holes of his mask.

The elevator came to a stop one floor below. The gate here was already open, and looked out on a dim, dank room full of forgotten oddities – outdated equipment, boxes of old files, broken gurneys, and piles of unsold copies of Dr. Chilton’s self-help book he’d published in the 90’s, *One Day My Brain Just Opened Up!* Will suppressed a laugh that probably would have come out as a shriek, braided with the swarm of dread that surrounded him.

If there were security cameras down here it’d be a surprise, and there was no reason for Chilton to be audio recording a storage room. Despite the situation, it was a relief to be free of the weight of constant surveillance.

Maybe this was a trick the orderlies were playing. Some kind of hazing thing. They’d leave him down here to teach him a lesson. He shouldn’t have shot his mouth off–

Faintly, Will heard the sound of footsteps, shoes on the dusty concrete floor.

Hannibal Lecter stepped onto the elevator platform, illuminated by the weak light that came from the shaft above.

Rage unlike anything Will had ever known threatened to split him in half. The inferno swept through him, searing a path of destruction. In its wake, ashes – a savage, starving grief, a famine of the heart. He couldn't move. Couldn't speak. Somehow, when he'd confronted Hannibal yesterday in his cell, knowing that the guards were close and Chilton was probably listening in on their conversation, he'd felt bold. Righteous. He'd threatened Hannibal with a reckoning, laid it all out, said exactly what needed to be said.

But here, now, he was alone, and at Hannibal's mercy. Again.

Hannibal came to stand in front of him, wearing his overcoat, an immaculate suit beneath. His expression was… expressionless. It was a lifelike mask, but it emoted only a genetic reflection of what a human face was capable of.

"Hello, Will," he said, sounding warm and human enough to pass, if you didn't know what you were looking for.

Will didn't speak – couldn't make his mouth move, any words locked deep inside of him. All he could do was try to breathe as Hannibal came closer still. He leaned in, face inches from Will's and worked at the buckles behind Will's head. Will looked him right in the eyes, as if compelled to do so. He had the notion he might turn to stone, that Hannibal was some kind of beast spoken of in epics that had transcended centuries.

Hannibal lifted the mask away from Will's face and hung it on one of the handles of the dolly. Will was assaulted by the luxurious smell of him. He well knew that memories linked to smells were some of the strongest human beings could experience. Still, he never expected to be bombarded with reel after reel of events playing on the movie screen of his mind. Hannibal's scent transported him back to the bed, the shower, the office – everywhere they had been intimate.

But now the scent had an added layer he'd never noticed before. Something sickeningly sweet, like rot. Hannibal smelled like a funerary flower.

Will knew he was dangerously close to crying, but never in a million years would he give Hannibal that satisfaction. "What," he asked lowly, dangerously, "the *fuck* are you doing here?"

"I wanted to speak to you somewhere where we weren't being recorded." Hannibal's voice was mild, maybe even friendly, matter-of-fact.

Will's veins iced. "If you're gonna kill me, can you just… get it *over with*?" His voice shook as he shoved the tears back down his throat. He closed his eyes and pictured the dogs running through the timber. That was what he wanted to be the last image in his mind before the end.

"I'm not here to kill you."

A gentle hand cupped his cheek. Will's eyes shot open and he jerked his head away. "Don't touch me," he snarled.

Hannibal said nothing, just slowly lowered his hand to his side again.

"The irony," Will went on, unable to stop himself, the words falling out of his mouth, the dam breached, "of me wearing a bite mask, when that was always *your* signature."

A tiny line, so small Will couldn't be sure it was even there, formed between Hannibal's eyebrows, and something changed in the color of his eyes.

Will had no intention of stopping, and didn't know if he could, even if he'd wanted to. "You sat by my *bed* in the hospital and you… held my *hand* ," he spat, vicious anger wrapping around his tongue like a constricting snake. "You talked to me. I could hear you. I could feel you there, my hand in yours, like you *gave a shit* about me. A-a-a–s if it wouldn't have made your life easier if I'd n-never woken up."

The wrinkle on Hannibal's forehead deepened, and a new set of lines appeared at the corners of his eyes. He was cracking, it seemed, like an aged oil painting.

"Do you have any idea," Will went on, his voice hoarse with emotion, "what it's like to be paralyzed and not be able to pull your hand away, out-out of the *grasp* of some… aberration of nature that-that should have died on the — on the vine — withered and *never thrived* ." The last word was strangled around his heart, withering itself, never to thrive again.

"Will."

Satisfaction rippled through Will, vengeance singing along his nerves. There was pain in the way Hannibal had said his name. It was a pleasant surprise until Will realized that these minuscule slips of emotion could be just as calculated as the rest of Hannibal. Was he truly hurt by the things Will was saying?

It didn't matter. Will needed to say them. This moment was a gift.

"I did things with you… that I never did with anyone… *anyone* else. Never dreamed of doing." Will's words scorched his lips as they left his mouth, voice quivering with a combination of rage and bitter sorrow. "Over and over again you asked me to trust you. And I let you in. I let you into my head, and I let you into my body. Fucking me for fun, j-just because you could – I mean, did you even *want* me, or was it part of the g-game? Wind me up and see what you could *get me to do* ? See how much I'd let you do to me?"

"Stop." Hannibal's soft word was a plea, a prayer for mercy.

There was none to be had.

"It must have been so easy," Will's rage simmered back, leaving him cold and cruel. "You had me wrapped around your finger. Heh, literally, even. Was it even a conquest to-to entrap someone so isolated and lonely? Maybe that's why you did *this* . You stuck me in here because you got bored."

“You kissed *me* ,” Hannibal said, mimicking Will’s icy tone. “That first night.”

“Biggest mistake I ever made.”

A glacial silence sat between them.

“I broke a promise to my mother. I told her I’d never say anything about that night on the road, but I told you, didn’t I? I told you everything. And – stupid, so fucking stupid – I thought you were doing the same. Opening up to me – l-like you finally found someone to connect with. All the while systematically cutting me off from anyone who might have cared about me or protected me.”

Will hadn’t wanted to cry. He was desperate not to give Hannibal the satisfaction, but the tears came nevertheless. They were silent, spilling down his cheeks and gathering at his chin before dropping onto the mottled surface of the straitjacket. “And that wasn’t even the worst thing. No, we’re just getting started.”

“Please, Will.”

“No, you don’t get to beg me for f-fucking *anything* anymore! Ever again!” Will’s voice echoed through the empty basement storage room, tearing out of his throat. “Do you remember standing in front of the window, watching the rain? You put your hand on me and you said we were Abigail’s fathers now. We were responsible for her. You-you painted this… this picture in my head that you *knew* I was desperate to see. You showed me a family portrait, you son of a bitch. You dangled it in front of me and then snatched it away.” At last, his voice succumbed to the tears and distorted into a half sob. “Why did you have to kill Abigail? I thought – you cared about her – you did – you did it – just to be – just to fucking *destroy* me.”

Will dropped his head and cried unabashedly for what felt like a long time. When he lifted it, sniffing, he saw Hannibal had moved closer, tears of his own cutting lines down his face. Will thought of the statue of Lucifer in the garden, his tears made of stone.

“I get it,” Will said softly, his voice watery but thick with his misery. “You had to frame someone. You were gonna get caught and you didn’t want to go to a place like this, or sit on death row. I was the easiest target. I made l-logical s-sense. No one… you knew no one would believe m-me… because I was very publicly losing my mind. I was the perfect… solution… to all your problems. But Hannibal…” His voice died in his throat as he struggled to swallow back a sob.

“Yes, Will?” Hannibal’s words were uttered in a strained half-whisper, burdened. He took another step closer.

“You could have chosen someone else,” Will said as a fresh set of tears spilled free. “You had the evidence. You could have planted it anywhere. Spun a story that made some kind of sense. Could’ve framed Jack, or-or Zeller, or some other poor bastard. But you chose *me* .”

Hannibal sighed. He raised his hand to his face, then looked at Will. His eyes were bloodshot. “I wish I could have helped you become the person you were meant to be, Will.”

“I’m what you made me.” Will drew a shaky breath.

Hannibal reached out for him. Will did his best to flinch away, straining against the straight jacket and the straps securing him to the wheeled cart. Hannibal drew his hand back, new tears gathering, welling up and spilling over. He reached out again. Will evaded, struggling vainly. Again Hannibal pulled back. “Will.” He breathed the name out in near silence. Once again, Hannibal extended his hand toward Will’s face. Will tried to turn away. He could feel the heat coming from Hannibal’s skin against his cheek, but Hannibal didn’t touch him, letting his palm merely linger in the air.

“Don’t,” Will said, so softly he could barely hear himself over his thudding heart.

Hannibal didn’t move, just looked at him, raw and unmasked. In the backstage of his mind where the ambient pulse lived, Will sensed a true *fear* in Hannibal, a fatal vulnerability that infected him like a virus, slowly taking hold of every part of him. He was *afraid* of Will in some way, even though Will was the one trussed up in a straight jacket and strapped down so tightly his shoulder wound ached. It wasn’t the fear of being proven a murderer, of Will winning the crusade to clear his name and dirtying Hannibal’s in the process. It was something else entirely and in turn, it terrified Will. Cornering a wounded predator was extremely dangerous.

And despite this — all of this — the terror and the betrayal and the deepest piercing ache he’d ever known, Will felt the undeniable magnetism of Hannibal’s touch. Before he knew what he was doing, Will’s body betrayed him. He gave in, and leaned his cheek into Hannibal’s hand.

Once they touched skin to skin, a feverish flush burned through every part of him, making him ache. Will’s anatomy betrayed him further by hardening immediately in response to this touch, this scent, those heartbroken eyes. He knew he was being played, that this was one more indignity, one more violation, but he couldn’t force his body to care. His conscience was torn from the driver’s seat.

Hannibal leaned closer, holding his gaze, drawing them together in tiny increments. Will was wholly aware of Hannibal’s hand curled around the side of his face, fingers splayed around his ear, tips pressed into his hair. Closer now. And then his movements ceased entirely with his mouth so close Will could feel his breath. No further. But the magnetic pull couldn’t be denied, and its grip on Will intensified, drawing him tighter and tighter like one of Tobias Budge’s catgut strings over the hollow body of an instrument.

He could hear the stag’s hoofs rasping on the concrete floor of the madhouse’s cellar. Felt the breeze as it ruffled its raven feathers.

Will gave in. He tilted his head forward and put his lips on Hannibal’s. Once the connection was made of Will’s own accord, Hannibal pressed himself against Will’s bound body and kissed him with a singular starving passion.

It all went away. The anger, injury, pain, betrayal, misery, all of it bled away, leaving only this moment, this series of sensations and tastes. Conscious thought stopped in its tracks and Will was a being of pure presence. He found himself straining against his restraints again, not

to get away from Hannibal but to be closer to him as Hannibal kissed down his throat, working his way back up to the base of Will's ear, then demanding his mouth again, one hand locked on Will's shoulder and the other winding through his hair.

Will made a sound that was halfway between a sigh and a moan when Hannibal touched his outline through the cheap fabric of the green hospital-issue jumpsuit. His pulse raced and every inch of flesh trapped between layers of clothing and buckled restraints cried out for release. The entire world, the whole of the known universe and its unknown parts as well, the space between atoms and the places beyond event horizons, every corner of his mind, it was all Hannibal, and it was beautiful. It was home.

Hannibal's touch, each individual finger, seemed to draw Will's peak from him like a conjuring.

In the perfect clarity that always came to him post-climax, even as Hannibal kissed him still, caressed his neck, circling it with a possessive grip, fingers in his hair, Will understood what he needed to do.

In order to call down his reckoning, he needed Hannibal close.

Hannibal kissed him one final time and pulled back, slowly letting him go. "As I told you before, Will… I have faith in you."

Will couldn't bring himself to speak. He was torn apart, limb-from-soul-limb, ripped asunder, trapped in a purgatory between powerful attraction and deep, instinctive repulsion towards the man that stood before him. He managed a slight nod.

Hannibal lifted the bite mask from the cart handle and gently slipped it over Will's head, taking care to position it correctly. He drew out the moment further by smoothing Will's hair so that it wasn't tangled in the straps after he'd re-buckled them. At last, he took Will's face in his hands and leaned in to press a final kiss against the mask's air holes, his lips barred from touching Will's, but their intention unmistakable.

"I want to help you, Will. I can, if you'll let me."

Without waiting for an answer from Will, Hannibal stepped out of the elevator and pressed a button on the wall. The mechanism whirred to life, sending Will back up to the first basement floor of the hospital. They held each other's gazes until the elevator's ascension severed the bond.

… and CUT!

Now start the episode again. After visiting Will, Hannibal gets it together and shows up to have his cheek swabbed and his suits tested for trace evidence. Watch this scene assuming that just a couple of hours before he was a complete mess. Both Will and Hannibal choose

their words carefully throughout the prison scenes in the next episodes, knowing that Chilton could be watching or listening… keep that in mind as there are words like "friend" that have a loaded meaning…

…stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 2: Sakizuke

Chapter Summary

Will is pretending to question his accusations of Hannibal. He knows he needs Hannibal close if he's going to figure out what really happened to Abigail. He tearfully asks for Hannibal's help, and meets with him in the cage room. After, Hannibal wants to see Will alone in the cellar of the Baltimore State Hospital, where Chilton can't listen in. If Will has really stopped suspecting Hannibal, he should have no problem re-igniting their affair, right?

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Climbing Up the Walls” – Radiohead

“I am the key to the lock in your house
That keeps your toys in the basement
And if you get too far inside
You'll only see my reflection
It's always best when the light is off
I am the pick in the ice
Do not cry out or hit the alarm
You know we're friends till we die
And either way you turn
I'll be there
Open up your skull
I'll be there
Climbing up the walls”

This “cut unscene” occurs the evening after Hannibal visits Will in the cage room (cue the pissing contest banter). During that scene, Hannibal warns Will that anything he might remember or think he remembers is a distortion of reality. Will (lying) assures Hannibal he hasn’t remembered anything, and maintains the facade that he’s changed his mind about accusing Hannibal. Hannibal seems to be testing the waters, making sure Will is truly letting his accusations go. Later that day, Beverly Katz visits again and shows Will more crime scene photographs. He gives her a lead on where to look for the human muralist’s victims. This scene happens in the evening after that meeting.

Max deposited the slobbery tennis ball at Will's feet and barked. Ellie lifted her head from her paws and yawned, and Zoe shot Max a dirty look from where she was curled up on Will's lap. "Sorry, girl," Will said as he bent in his chair to scoop up the ball, jostling her resting place. She hopped down with a huff of protest, but raced after the ball when he threw it, hot on Max's tail.

Buster raced by the front porch where Will sat, nipping at Jack's heels, his new favorite pastime. It was funny watching chubby little Buster picking on the much larger dog, but Will didn't put up with bad behavior. "Buster!" he scolded, and the dog veered away from bullying his brother. "Good boy."

Harley and Winston each gripped the end of a stick and tugged it back and forth. Ellie brought Will her rope toy and he held into the other end while she pulled and twisted, shaking her head back and forth vigorously. "Ellie, you're gonna tear my arm off," Will complained with a laugh.

The sunset washed the sky with oranges that ranged from vivid and tropical to humble rust. Will stood and stretched, stooping to pick up his whiskey bottle. He opened the front door to the house and whistled between his teeth, brief but piercing. It rang between the trees and down his gravel drive. The dogs responded immediately, racing to the porch where they trotted up the steps and filed inside.

Will kicked off his shoes and nudged them into their place on the rug next to the door, and set the whiskey bottle down to hang up his jacket. Picking his way through the minefield of dog beds, he leaned in and switched on the space heater. Will crossed the dark kitchen and stood at the door to the cellar steps. Unbuttoning his shirt, he stripped it off, leaving him in a gray tee, and unzipped his pants. Balling up the laundry, he opened the basement door and expertly tossed it down the steps and directly into a carefully positioned laundry hamper.

He turned and found the dogs gathered in the kitchen, eyes bright and tails wagging. They knew the routine, and now it was time for treats. Will sat at the kitchen table and ran them through a few tricks, feeding them the expensive locally made biscuits he spent a hefty chunk of his paycheck on.

"All right, bedtime. C'mon."

The pack knew this routine as well, and immediately went to their beds, each dog returning to their usual spot. Max flopped down without ceremony, but Zoe was the queen of spinning around so many times just watching her made Will sick. At last, she settled in, and Will followed suit, sliding into bed with a satisfied sigh.

Winston left his cushion and jumped up next to Will. "Hey, no dogs on the bed," Will warned him. Winston whined and lay down in spite of Will's command, drooping his muzzle to his paws and looking up at Will with soft, pitiful eyes the color of darkened honey.

Will smiled with a sigh. "Just for tonight, and, ah… don't tell anyone."

He lay back and turned on his side. Winston curled up right against him so they were spine to spine.

A good night's sleep. Then maybe swing by the residential facility and pick up Abigail, load all the dogs in the back of the Volvo and try out that dog park he'd heard about—

"Mr. Graham."

Will's eyes shot open. He stared for a moment at the cell wall, trying to reorient himself for a moment before wishing he hadn't. Same cell. Same wall. Same Baltimore State Hospital. Same waking nightmare.

He sat up and swung his legs from his cot, turning to look at the pair of orderlies waiting outside his cell. They shouldn't be there. It was after lights out. Once his eyes adjusted, he was able to identify Sully and Ed. His heart wrung itself dry with a sickening twist.

"Shower time," Sully told him. "And good news, laundry has clean clothes ready for you."

It was Saturday. Laundry came on Mondays and Thursdays. Unasked questions lodged themselves in Will's throat, but he knew giving voice to them was meaningless. Hannibal had to be behind this. The thought simultaneously excited him and filled him with a sense of dread that hung itself around his neck. He stood and steadied himself with a few breaths, slowly stripping off his green jumpsuit. The cool air of the subterranean cell block was heaven on his rapidly flushing skin.

He'd told Hannibal he wanted his help, all but apologized for accusing him of framing Will for murder. As far as he knew, Hannibal bought the story, although Will had been hyper aware of the scrutinizing looks Hannibal was giving him during their conversation. Will had never been in a position where he'd had to lie to this degree. It had been significantly less abhorrent than he'd anticipated. Probably because he was repaying Hannibal in kind. Eye for an eye, lie for a lie.

After the meeting, after his tears and pleas for help, Will had gone back to his cell exhausted by his subterfuge, struggling under the weight of crafting his mask. Now he was going to have to put it back on again, not just over his face this time, but his whole body, a costume of forgiveness. Because if what happened last time happened again…

Not that he'd needed to fake his physical response. But Hannibal was observant enough that he would be able to tell if Will wasn't entirely engaged in the moment. This had to be method acting.

"Approach the door, please." Ed held up a pair of handcuffs. Will obeyed, then turned to put his hands through to be cuffed behind his back.

"No." Sully said curtly, with a yellow-toothed sneer. He spun his finger around as if casting a spell in a bad movie.

Will turned to face them and put his hands out of the opening in the bars. Ed fixed on the cuffs before checking their tightness. Will had a history of dislocating his thumb, after all.

When he was satisfied, Ed nodded and Sully unlocked the door. Will shoved his feet into his rubber shower sandals and they led him down the dank hallway, parading him past the other cells in his tee shirt and shorts.

Will was not surprised in the slightest when, instead of taking him to the shower room, the orderlies led him back down the dank, dim maintenance halls to the old elevator. Ed moved the gate and pushed the button, calling the ancient machinery to life. Will waited in grim silence, heart throbbing in a painful, anxious swell inside him, filling his blood with foreboding. There was always the outside chance that this was the time Hannibal was going to kill him. Maybe his act hadn't been good enough, and Hannibal was well aware that Will was in for the long con. If Hannibal thought Will was being manipulative, that might be reason enough to put an end to him.

As the dilapidated elevator creaked into view a few inches at a time, Will's nerves spiked like brambles through his body, every vein a thorn. "How much is he paying you?" he blurted suddenly, unable to keep his mouth shut, voice barbed with disgust.

"Why? You have a counter offer?" Sully asked, hooking a thumb in his belt with a sneer.

"Mr. Graham is unemployed, I believe," Ed remarked as the elevator ground to a halt.

"Well, guess you're shit out of luck then." Sully tried to push Will into the dim berth of the freight elevator. Will resisted momentarily, and was rewarded with a harder shove that sent him stumbling forward. He deeply considered, in that moment, turning around and making them both very, very sorry. He was only cuffed in the front, and his mind showed him the steps as though he was reconstructing a crime: Trip Sully, stomp on his neck, elbow Ed in the throat, get the cuff chain around his neck—

No. Will shook his head, shoving the thoughts away as the orderlies closed the gate behind him and sent the elevator back down. Just because everyone thought he was a killer didn't mean he had to live up to expectations.

Often, we become what others see of us.

Will forced himself to breathe evenly, systematically telling his muscles to relax.

This time, Hannibal was waiting for him in the open. He'd dragged two discarded chairs together, rejects from Chilton's office, probably, their upholstery shabby and worn thin on the arms. Behind and to the left of this makeshift sitting area was a cleared bit of floor space. Two prison mattresses lay next to each other, the heads against the wall, their edges touching it just below a series of thick pipes that ran along the length of the room just above the baseboard. The tableau injected Will with a new jolt of anxiety, and a strange but pleasant anticipation he didn't want to acknowledge.

Hannibal was the picture of polished poise, wearing his usual interested but serene expression, sitting in one of the armchairs with his ankle tucked over his knee, hands folded. He caught Will's eye and they kept the contact steady as the elevator slowly descended, finally grinding to a halt. If Will wasn't mistaken – and he knew he wasn't – Hannibal had changed clothes since they'd seen each other that morning. He was wearing the suit with the

champagne tie tonight. Will knew it well – Hannibal had worn it the day Will had come over early before his appointment and they'd ended up in the shower–

Will stole his tongue between his lips before closing his mouth firmly. He remembered the tie from another day as well, not long before Tobias Budge, when he'd passed Hannibal in the hall at the BSU. Hannibal had been speaking with Alana, but Will couldn't let himself walk by without acknowledgement. "Nice tie," he'd mumbled, just to have something to say before dropping his head and walking quickly away. Had Hannibal remembered such a trivial compliment?

"Hello, Will," Hannibal greeted. Will sensed a kind of hesitation in his voice, as if Hannibal was out of practice talking to him, desperate for the effortless discourse they once shared.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter." Will couldn't help himself, but immediately regretted his decision to use the professional name. Hannibal needed to believe. They both did. Convincing Hannibal would be a thousand times easier if he could convince himself, at least for this moment. He dropped his eyes in a gesture of shyness, then looked up at Hannibal again. "H-Hannibal," he corrected himself.

"Please forgive our surroundings."

"It's fine."

Hannibal motioned for Will to sit in the armchair opposite. He accepted, sinking into the cushions with a little huff of relief. Despite the fabric suggesting these chairs, along with the piles of self-help books, were also from the nineties, the recliner was the most comfortable piece of furniture Will had put his ass on in a while.

"I must also apologize for the late hour."

"It's not like I, ah, have… big *plans* tomorrow," Will said, lifting his cuffed wrists briefly.

"You asked for my help," Hannibal said, dropping his foot back to the floor and leaning closer. "I am here to provide it."

A wave of pungent revulsion swept through him at Hannibal's nearness. For a moment, Will saw himself pointing the gun at Hannibal in the Hobbs' kitchen, the way Hannibal's eyes glimmered just beyond the barrel, shining with curiosity, fascination, and some kind of satisfied admiration, almost daring Will to shoot him, but with a confidence that knew he wouldn't, or couldn't. So much said in a look, telegraphed in a glance.

The way Hannibal looked at him now was unsettlingly similar, but with an added layer of softness.

"Thank you," Will heard himself saying, "for coming. For… arranging this. It's nice to be out of the cell." *That you put me in,* he thought before hushing his brain fiercely. He fought to keep his expression unchanged.

“I cannot be entirely effective in assisting you if Dr. Chilton insists on listening in,” Hannibal said, then went quiet for a long moment, studying Will intently before his expression softened. “This situation has been difficult. For both of us, I imagine.”

Will nodded. Easy enough to agree, because it was true. “I know which is worse,” he said softly, leaning forward, resting his elbow on the arm of the chair, the chain between his restraints clinking gently. “I’d rather it be me who’s guilty, instead of-of you *putting* me here.”

Hannibal reached out slowly, like a person trying to tame a frightened animal. He put his hand on Will’s, heavy and smooth-palmed, deliciously warm. Will looked down at it, studying the knuckles, nails, the raised tracks of tendons and sinew. That hand alone had such immeasurable power. It had caressed Will’s skin, washed his feet, stroked his hair, conjured innumerable pleasures. It had also slit Abigail’s throat, placed the comb next to Georgia Madchen, cut Cassie Boyle’s lungs from her body while she was still breathing.

Will closed his eyes a moment and imagined himself back in the kitchen of his little house in Wolf Trap. In his mind’s eye, he saw himself open up the metal lockbox where he kept his passport, social security card, and, recently, his gun when he wasn’t in the field. He watched his hands open the box, finding it empty. Then, piece by piece, the bottom of the box cracked away like melting ice, revealing an endless black void. Will compressed all of his despair and terror and pain, the images of Hannibal’s victims, everything within him that found Hannibal otherworldly and repulsive. They appeared in his hand in the shape of a stag figurine, a small-scale version of the one in Hannibal’s office. The Will in his mind dropped the stag figurine into the black void, watching it disappear into oblivion before closing the lid on the box.

He knew he could bring it back if he needed to. All he had to do was type in the combination and open the box. But for now, it was locked up. It had to be, if he was going to make this work.

When he opened his eyes, Will’s world was blurry, the edges of things undefined. He blinked, and silent tears spilled from his eyes.

Hannibal lifted the hand that rested on Will’s and brushed the drops aside, first one, then the other. He let his fingers linger on Will’s damp cheek. “It was upsetting, not to be able to do this. I would have given anything to get you out of that cage that very second.”

“It’s – with you on the other side of the bars – I can’t…” Will let himself trail off, then take a breath. “I’m glad you came, that you – that you figured out a way to see me without the bars b-between us. That you trust me… that you know I – I won’t try and hurt you.”

“One must offer trust in order to receive it.” Hannibal sat back, breaking their touch connection. Will took a shaky breath, feeling its absence like a part of him had been carved out, left hollow. “You said that you trusted me before all of this, and that you needed to trust me again. Will.” Hannibal’s eyes had gone soft, dark. “You still do. It’s what you need more than any other form of treatment.”

“Yes.” Will reached up to brush his hair out of his eyes, one hand trailing the other with it by the chain of the handcuffs. Dropping his hands again, he looked up at Hannibal plaintively, tongue stealing out to touch his lip, just the tiniest bit of the tip. He observed, with no small bit of triumph, that Hannibal’s mouth changed color and he shifted in his seat. “I’ve been – so confused. And it’s worse now that the encephalitis has cleared up. There’s this… sharp *line* in my mind, like a, like the edge of a knife. On one side is *before* and one side is *after* , and-and crossing the border… it’s…” He made a helpless little gesture with his bound hands.

“When you felt betrayed by me, you were compelled to smash the teacup.” Hannibal’s voice was velvet against him. Will let himself be overtaken by its sumptuous texture. “Now you find yourself among the pieces.”

“I don’t know how to fix it,” Will said. “I think there are too many pieces for me to carry without dropping them.”

“I’ll help you,” Hannibal promised. “Haven’t I told you I will mend you with gold?”

Will nodded. Desire crashed through him as he opened the gates and let the images come.

Hannibal holding out his hand after inviting Will back to his bed with promises of repairing what had been damaged within him.

Hannibal pressing into him from behind, a hand clamped against his with a passionate, possessive grip. The incredible release of anguish and acceptance of pleasure and safety.

That was the night Hannibal had told him he was the most beautiful thing God ever made. Will had tried to murder these memories, but they would always evade his blade.

There was no need to fake his body’s response, and he was absolutely sure Hannibal noticed, though he made no obvious outward indication. But Will could feel the victory rolling off of him like a scent. It was infuriating, but glorious.

“Ms. Katz came to see you.” As usual, not a question.

“Y-yeah, she-she did. She wanted me to look at some more pictures. They found another body. But, uh, you know that.”

Hannibal tilted his head a few degrees to the left. “Another for the discard pile, it seems.”

Will nodded, though that wasn’t true. Roland Umber had escaped, and Hannibal knew that, too, though why he wasn’t being forthcoming with the FBI was anyone’s guess. Not Will’s problem, at least not at the moment. “I think she just – wanted a reason to visit,” he lied. “Even though it’s hard on both of us.”

“Ms. Katz has been a good friend to you. I hope she can remain that way, even under the circumstances. But as I said, you must take care. When we mend the teacup, we don’t want to replace the original pieces with those influenced by the world’s monsters.”

Hypocrite, Will’s mind snarled, but he took a breath and forced the word deep down inside of him, burying it in shadow. Instead, he focused on the strip of flesh just above Hannibal’s

perfectly starched collar, and imagined how it might taste, or how the silk of the champagne tie might feel between his fingers. Arousal was his survival mechanism.

“Jack once told me that my work with the FBI provided me with, ah… structure. A framework. Something… that feels *normal* .” He chuckled softly at the ironic implication. “It’s true in here, too. Looking at those pictures, empathizing with the killers – it’s like – it’s like a comfort. A c-connection to something I used to do. In my other life.”

Hannibal seemed to consider his response, then stood. He slid free of his suit jacket and folded it carefully over the back of the cushioned chair. “Will,” he said softly, his face sliced through with bar-shaped shadows cast from the dim light of the elevator, “I want to give you something normal to focus on that doesn’t involve murder. Something else from your previous life. But in order to do that, we must conduct an exercise in trust.”

“An exercise?”

Hannibal made a sound of assent and nodded. From his pocket he withdrew a piece of dark red fabric, some kind of silky material. He approached Will slowly, as if afraid he would bolt. Will ignored every instinct of self preservation, even as klaxons sounded in his head. He watched Hannibal step around the back of Will’s chair, then forced himself to face forward. “Even if your conscious mind has accepted my help with your recovery, your underlying primitive brain may not have. We need a marriage of the two.”

The length of scarlet fabric brushed the back of Will’s neck. He shivered but didn’t flinch, even as Hannibal ran the fabric across his throat, circling it. Will could feel his pulse racing against the sensual ligature, which Hannibal pulled firmly against his neck, though not constructing by any means.

“Shall we conduct the exercise?” Hannibal’s voice was maddeningly mundane, even though he must have seen Will’s outline straining against the confines of his shorts. “This can’t happen without your permission, Will.”

“Yes,” he said immediately. It was easy to agree. Because as terrifying as it was having a murderer behind him with a silk scarf around his neck, ready to choke him to death with it, the desire, the ache of his want for Hannibal and intimacy was stronger. No need to put up an act. Will closed his eyes and let himself plunge into it.

The scarf tightened for only the tiniest squeeze, then slackened. Will held his breath as Hannibal lifted the fabric and instead tied it around Will’s eyes. Will’s world became blood-tinged darkness. Immediately he could feel his other senses ratcheting themselves up to compensate. He was desperate to lift his cuffed hands and push the fabric away, but forced himself to ease the panic back. He heard Hannibal move, a rustle of fine clothing, and there was a hand on his arm, guiding him to his feet.

“Walk with me, Will. Just a few steps.”

Will let Hannibal lead him by the arm a short way, stopping when Will’s toes felt the edges of something soft. He pictured the room as he’d first seen it descending the elevator, and used his visual memory for spatial awareness. They were next to the mattresses on the floor, facing

the wall. A little breath breached his lips, catching in his windpipe as liquid fire rushed through him, mapping the paths of blood through his body.

"You look different than I remember you," Hannibal said just behind his ear, running the fingers of one hand across Will's abdomen as if carving a smile. "Maybe it's because I know you have scars now that I haven't seen." Now the gentle touch traced down from just below Will's left nipple to his waistline.

Will shivered with sudden force, enough that he was sure Hannibal noticed. He held his breath again before releasing it, voice strained. "I, uhm – I do."

Hannibal pressed into him from behind, and Will was immediately aware of his arousal forcing itself against his backside. "I'd like to see them again," Hannibal whispered, "my friends, old and new."

Sweat gathered on Will's hairline and he licked his bottom lip nervously. "Some of them you gave me," he said, almost without the breath to form the words. "One of your bites – the bruise won't go away."

He took Will by the hips and positioned him so they faced each other, though Will couldn't be entirely certain with his eyes covered. "I gave them because you wanted me to." Hannibal eased Will's shirt up and slid his hand beneath. He ran his icy thumb gingerly over the shadow of teeth marks that marred the flesh just below Will's collarbone on the right side. "You still want me to."

Yes, his mind all but shouted. In Hannibal's voice. Will could only nod.

"Say it, Will." Hannibal let the shirt fall back. Will let out a small huff of frustration. "It's important that you say it." A pause. "Haven't I always known what you wanted, even more than you knew yourself?"

"Hannibal—"

Hannibal's stone-strong fingers curled around his wrist just above the handcuffs, gripping with such force for a moment that Will almost went to his knees. With a soft grunt, he gave an exploratory pull to get free. He might as well have been trying to pull his arm out of dried concrete.

"Say it."

"Yes," Will responded immediately.

"Do you trust me, Will?"

Another hitching breath bucked against his heaving heart, fenced in by his ribs. "Yes."

"Good." Hannibal released his arm and touched his face gently instead. The message was clear enough. It was a reminder. Hannibal could take without asking, and that thought arrested Will's willpower in a matter of seconds.

Hannibal put a hand on Will's throat, his thumb resting in the hollow at the top of his clavicle. "Listen to that heart," he murmured. Will could feel it thudding against the pressure of his fingers. "Is it fear?" He increased the force against Will's shoulder and neck. "Or desire?" Hannibal's voice was gentle and predatory simultaneously. "A little of both, I should think."

Will swallowed, his throat a desert. "S-sounds about right."

"I'll ask you again, Will. Don't lie to me. Don't lie to yourself. Do you trust me?"

He spoke so softly, it was nearly inaudible. "Yes."

Hannibal let go of him and took a half-step back that Will could hear. "Good," he said. "Then do as I say. Lay down. Put your hands above your head and hold on."

Will obeyed him.

Giving in felt incredible. It all fell out of his hands now. Hannibal was inevitable. He'd been stupid to think otherwise.

In the soft blackness of the backside of his eyelids, all of his senses — or, his sense, as in good sense, as in instinct — told him he was in danger, lying supine, tender throat and belly exposed. Hannibal's unmistakable perfume was everywhere, and the scent intensified along with a series of sounds, the rustle of cloth and the soft clank of a belt buckle. Now he sensed Hannibal's weight as he knelt, looming over him. Will felt Hannibal adjust the handcuffs around his wrists where he gripped the metal pipe he'd seen earlier.

The silk slithered away from his head as Hannibal removed the blindfold.

"Open your eyes."

Will obeyed.

Hannibal knelt over him, stripped completely, only half-visible in the dim lighting. Will glanced up to see his handcuffs zip tied to the pipe by the chain that stretched between the manacles. He tested the strength of the restraints. He might be able to rub the plastic of the zip tie enough against the pipe's uneven surface to weaken it and snap it off. In time. But the time for any sort of escape was over. Hannibal was leaning over him now, blocking out the rest of the light.

Hannibal traced his cool fingers lightly over Will's forehead, and caressed his cheek with the side of his knuckles. His pale lips had gone rosy, perhaps in anticipation. "This is very dreamlike," he said, voice husky, hushed, as his hand traveled down over Will's throat. "I feared I'd never be able to touch you like this again." A soft kiss, then another. Will closed his eyes to savor the sensation. God, he'd missed this. Missed *him* . He tugged desperately against the cuffs with sudden fury.

Hannibal slid his other hand down between Will's legs, and he couldn't keep quiet, straining against his bonds as his back arched. A few maddeningly brief touches before Hannibal

pushed Will's shirt up over his head, letting it rest against his forearms, further hindering his movement. Will's body suffered acutely now, to the point of pain. Hannibal bent his head over and put his lips against Will's hip. He could feel Hannibal's mouth over the edge of bone there, sucking before tracing the outline with his tongue. The unmistakable smell of Hannibal was everywhere, the combination of cologne and body and some kind of pheromone that mixed into an intoxicating cocktail. Will let it further impede his instincts and erode his self preservation, whittle away at the truth.

Hannibal rose and put his knees on either side of Will's hips, pinning him down further. "It would have been a pity," he said, leaning over again to cast his shadow over Will's prone body, "to never taste you again."

He propped himself up with one hand and ran the other through Will's hair, brushing his thumb along the hollow beneath his cheekbone. "Are you still dreaming, Will? At night, in your cell? Can your imagination take you to other places?"

"I dream about you," Will confessed, to Hannibal and to himself for the first time. Before, he hadn't allowed himself to acknowledge the existence of his nightly dreams about Hannibal. Terrifying, beautiful dreams that left him feverish, frustrated, and achingly empty. "And I-I..."

Hannibal put his mouth to the soft spot over Will's floating ribs, and dragged his teeth over the flesh there, not hard enough to leave any kind of mark behind, which was twice as cruel as a bite would have been. Will gasped, pulling at his bonds. The pipe groaned, but did not budge. The sharpness of the torture ebbed away as Hannibal put his mouth over it, his tongue a balm.

"Please," Will gasped, arching his back against Hannibal's legs that had him trapped against the mattress. He felt the sharp bite of the handcuffs against the flesh of his wrists. "Let me go. I want to touch you"

"Trust me, Will." Hannibal ran his tongue up Will's chest, grazing over one nipple, and crawled closer to kiss him before pulling away, tantalizingly out of reach. He traced his fingers across Will's collarbone. "I love this part of your body," he murmured, trailing his fingers along the two sides of Will's clavicle, kissing where they came together, stroking his neck. "The skin is remarkably soft, and you respond just so when it's touched." Hannibal came down and kissed along this expanse, and Will realized he was right, the heat in his body coalescing along this ridge of bone and skin in a sudden swell.

Hannibal put a hand in Will's hair, the other supporting him as he leaned down, again blocking out the dirty light that came from the elevator shaft. "Do you want me, Will?"

"Yes," Will panted, trying to push his hips into Hannibal, desperate for attention there.

"In entirety?"

"Yes, damn it." Will was practically choking on his own desire, feeling his breath thinning as he hyperventilated, sweat dampening his hair and the small of his back.

The triumphant look on Hannibal's face was at once deeply arresting and infuriating. Will thought his flinty anger mixed with his bone-deep lust might actually cause his heart to stop.

Hannibal got to his feet, watching Will writhe beneath him, pulling helplessly at the handcuffs, his hands numb with the effort. Hannibal carefully adjusted his clothes on the back of the chair and withdrew a small bottle from his inner suit jacket pocket. At last, he came back to Will and knelt to remove his shorts and lay them gently to the side. After lubricating his hand, he touched Will and was rewarded with a sharp intake of breath and a low, reckless moan. He languished under Hannibal's maddening way of handling him, so restrained and methodical. A finger circled his entrance, teased the muscles there before sliding once, and only once, up and down his length. Will gasped, tossing his head back and arching his spine.

Hannibal gave him a self-satisfied half-smile before at last pressing the pad of his finger in. Will strained again, ignoring the pain that sang through his wrists and down his arms. He squeezed his eyes shut against the silhouette of the stag that stalked back and forth behind Hannibal as if the creature was just as agitated, as wantonly irascible as he felt. When Hannibal's finger found its target, the stag reared, antlers grazing the ceiling.

"Let go, Will," Hannibal whispered, adding another finger, moving them both to ease the passage. Will's breaths were erratic and shallow, hitching in his lungs as Hannibal brushed the sweet spot intermittently. He had no idea he was so close and was caught off guard by climaxing in a sudden rush, the pleasure radiating out from his center and seeming to reach every corner of his body, from throat to fingers, flooding down his legs.

He was pliable, still trembling and weak in the wake of it when Hannibal pushed into him with obscene impatience. Will was torn from his reverie at the sudden pressure and splitting sensation, inhaling sharply.

Hannibal in him. Hannibal in his head, inside his body, everywhere.

I don't know who I am.

Instead of the slow, insidious replacement of his identity with parts of others, this was a singular and all-encompassing domination that collected the fractured pieces of himself and welded them together again. Except this time, the arrangement was someone else's design. Hannibal's design.

Will wanted to be remade, reborn, and despite what Hannibal had done to him, in this moment, he didn't care, as long as he was whole again.

Hannibal was thrusting now, hard, sweat on his brow, that primal side of him that Will knew all too well rising up from the depths where it was usually contained. He took Will in the front with his slicked hand and added another layer of stimulation that was almost too much to experience. If Will didn't intimately know what it was like to lose one's mind, he might consider this feeling to be a similar sensation, an intricate weave of pain and pleasure, of simultaneous give and take, attack and release.

He came again. His breath went flat in his lungs and he saw silver flashes explode over his vision, a fireworks show on the back of his eyelids. He gripped the pipe as an accompanying

wave of force rolled through him in a tidal rush of pleasure, so much deeper, so much better than just a physical orgasm. This was something more, and he realized it always had been that way with Hannibal. He felt himself swept off into nothing, a place of no thoughts and overwhelming sensation that lingered, silencing all else.

Will stirred when Hannibal cut the zip tie to release the cuffs from the pipe. As they lay face to face on the makeshift bed, Hannibal massaged the red skin of his wrists, kissed the tender spots. He held Will's cold hands against his warm chest with one hand, and reached out to stroke Will's cheek, seeming to relish the feel of his stubble. "Thank you, Will," he said softly, "for your trust."

Will put his head on Hannibal's shoulder and pressed himself as tightly as he could against his chest with his hands cuffed. Hannibal put his arms around him. "If you insist on casting yourself as the unreliable narrator of your own story, I hope that you have not assigned me the villain's role."

"No," Will assured him, drowning in their closeness, their mingled scent.

Let this moment never end. Let it not be ruined by the truth.

"I need you to promise me something, Will."

"What is it?"

"That tomorrow you won't hate yourself for letting me back in." He paused, trailing his fingers along the back of Will's neck, then up into his hair, dampened with sweat. "That you still want my help."

Will struggled up on one elbow, his whole body delightfully sore. He bore his discomfort like a mark that Hannibal might have left on him, if it would not have given this little rendezvous away. He leaned over Hannibal and lowered his head to press a kiss into the waiting lips that blushed with gratitude.

"I promise," he lied.

...and CUT!

The next day, flying high on his restored connection with Will, Hannibal finds the Muralist and tells him how much he loves his work! He helps complete the mural by adding the artist to the art.

... stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 3: Hassun

Chapter Summary

A fire breaks out in the break room at the Baltimore State Hospital for the criminally insane. Will has a run-in with another inmate who injures him. Unsatisfied with Will's medical treatment, Hannibal sneaks into the hospital to give Will a taste of his "bedside manner..."

Chapter Notes

Season 2 Episode 3: Hassun

Companion Song: “Black Milk” by Massive Attack
“You're not my eater
I'm not your food
Love you for God
Love you for the mother
Eat me
In the space
Within my heart
Love you for God
Love you for the mother”

This “cut unscene” takes place the evening after Hannibal testifies in court on Will’s behalf. He’s been consulted on the bailiff’s murder case and offers his profile as proof of Will’s innocence, blaming the murders Will’s been accused of on this new killer. He says he failed Will because he couldn’t figure out if the stress that caused him to break was due to mental illness or his work with the FBI. However, the prosecution points out that the bullet to the bailiff’s heart was such a huge deviation from the usual MO that there’s no way it’s the same killer. The judge rules the new defense inadmissible. Cut to Hannibal sitting in his office, staring at Will’s empty chair. Cut to Will, sitting in his cell dejectedly. This scene happens then.

Loneliness settled over him, sitting in his stomach like a hunk of lead, melding with the sludgy remains of the pathetic dinner he’d forced himself to eat. Fucking salisbury steak again. Will thought about fried fish, about cheeseburgers, about the chimichanga he’d shared with Beverly Katz at Hacienda Las Glorias. And then, against his will, he thought about the trout Hannibal had served him poached in white wine. He turned those memories away,

shutting his mental door in their faces, and instead let his mind take him to the water. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" Will watched Abigail patiently threading a worm on her hook. They were fishing at the Boundary Waters in northern Minnesota this time, settled in a gently rocking canoe. Walleye. Abigail impaled her bait with no hesitation, her fingers swift and sure, her eyes blank and exacting.

She evaded the question. "What did you want to be?"

"A teacher," he said. "But I knew I, ah, didn't have the temperament. For elementary or, uh, high school – any of the younger ones. Got to do it eventually at Quantico."

"Not anymore, though." Abigail said it as she cast her line.

"No, not anymore."

No sound now but the birds and the gentle lapping of the water against the sides of the canoe.

"If you knew you didn't have the temperament," Abigail asked tentatively, "why did you want to do it?"

Will shrugged. "When you're a kid, you only know so many careers. The ones they show you on TV or that you see in your life. My dad fixed boat motors, but he always told me, ah – he said he wanted me to make something of myself. Do better than he did. So diesel mechanic was, uhm, off the table. Firefighter, mailman, farmer…" He let go of his pole with one hand and scratched at his hairline beneath his cap.

"So you just picked it?" Abigail glanced at him from beneath the wide brim of her own hat. "That doesn't sound like you."

He smiled sidelong at her, pleased with her perception, feeling seen, recognized. "I moved so many times. It was just me and my dad, so I learned… to relate to adults more than other kids, I guess."

"You grew up too fast," Abigail told him.

"Most of the time the teachers ignored me. I behaved. They knew I was probably going to transfer sooner rather than later, so, uhm, they didn't invest much time or-or energy. But, ah, there were a few – they saw it was hard for me to make friends. They were – they were kind to me. I had a science teacher – Mr. Meyer – he let me stay after school. Clean his fish tank, set up for the labs. The other kids didn't like him. The teachers said he was, ah, too smart to be a high school teacher, that he should've been a college professor. He would abandon a-a lesson just to talk about something interesting that came up in discussion, well, interesting to him – and it was all… way over the heads of my classmates."

"But not over your head." Abigail reeled in her hook, then cast out again.

“No, not over my head. He-he was kind of a mess. Never graded anything on time. Boldly and, ah, unapologetically taught evolution in a South Carolina high school. A little too obsessed with insects. Stains on his tie, that kind of thing.” Will adjusted the brim of his hat. “I think he was lonely, too.”

“So you wanted to be like Mr. Meyer?”

“I wanted – I wanted to be as important to somebody as he was to me.”

Will’s declaration spread out over the water before dissipating into silence.

“Dad!” Abigail said suddenly. “I got a bite!”

“Stay calm. You know what to do.” Will watched in charmed anticipation as Abigail reeled in just like he’d taught her.

“I think it’s a big one!” Abigail cried, a huge smile glowing on her face. “Get the net!”

“Got it.” Will readied himself, steadying the net on the side of the boat. “Easy now, easy…”

But what rose from the water wasn’t a fish. Georgia Madchen broke to the surface, Abigail’s hook tangled in the stained cloth of her dress. She levitated up as though she were suspended on invisible strings or posed unmoving on a platform that pushed her further out of the water as she stood still. She looked like she had the last time he’d seen her alive, with smooth skin and bright eyes, pretty, a sad but welcoming curve to her lips. She dripped water back into the lake below as she stood on its surface, a holy miracle.

“Dad, who is that?” Abigail demanded as Georgia carefully removed the hook from her clothing and let it fall back into the water.

“That’s… Georgia,” he said softly, tears of gratitude springing to his eyes. “She’s alive. Did you hear me, Georgia?” He laughed even as he wept. “You’re not dead. I can see you. You’re alive.”

“But who is she to you?” Abigail wondered, reeling in the empty hook, seemingly unfazed that she’d caught a human being that was now walking towards the canoe on the surface of the water.

“She’s – like a sister. A twin,” Will explained, steadying the boat as he reached beckoning hand in Georgia’s direction. “She and I are just alike.”

“I’m sorry,” Georgia said softly. Then she burst into flames.

Abigail screamed. Will was frozen in his place, terror locking his muscles, chaining his mind and contorting his heart. Georgia did not move, did not make a sound as her hair became ashes and her skin began to crackle and split. Smoke rolled off of her in waves, thick charcoal clouds skimming across the surface of the water and enveloping their boat. Abigail began to cough and choke, and Will did as well, his lungs attempting to defy the smoke and save his life.

Will's eyes shot open and he sucked in a lungful of smoky air before dissolving into a chain of deep, racking coughs. There was black smoke pouring into his cell from the rusty vent in the ceiling. He could hear the other inmates in the cells on his block coughing and yelling for the orderlies. Will got up and went to the bars, sticking his face between them, trying to get a full breath.

Several minutes went by. Will could press his face right into the bars and see down to the end of the hall through his periphery, but the view was becoming hazy with smoke and his own lack of oxygen. He could make out vague white-coated shapes scurrying around at the end of the block, but nobody was coming down to help. "Hey!" he shouted, adding his voice to the cacophony of the other inmates, a symphony of alarm that grew steadily louder and more frantic. "Open the fucking doors!"

Another minute of no assistance. Will dropped to the floor below the smoke line, coughing so hard he thought he was going to vomit, eyes streaming tears. "If you let me die in here, Chilton – is gonna –"

Invoking Chilton's name seemed to do something, remarkably. Orderlies, hacking and coughing, began cuffing prisoners and leading them quickly out of the cellblock. Will was last in line, and the smoke was thickest down on his end of the hall. His head spun, heart filling his ears as he lay on the grimy floor trying to breathe. Just when he thought he was going to pass out, the orderlies arrived, screaming at him to put his hands behind his back. Will followed their instructions and was rewarded with a rescue, half-running with his escorts out of the cell block and into the adjacent hallway.

The fire seemed to be localized to somewhere near the air intake for Will's particular wing of the building. The meeting room with the cages was unaffected, and this is where the displaced inmates were being corralled. Will tried to wipe his eyes against his shoulder with his hands cuffed behind his back, muscles straining as his lungs sucked in clear air and tried to expel the foreign particles he'd inhaled. When his vision cleared, he beheld barely-contained chaos. There weren't enough orderlies for the number of inmates; some had already broken away from their captors and were on the ground kicking and screaming or trying to attack anyone in sight despite being shackled.

The orderlies reacted quickly, throwing open the doors of the visitation cages and shoving people inside. Will was smashed against the bars, then tossed into a cage with the inmate in the third cell of his block, a thankfully feeble-looking old man with a bushy white beard and eyebrows. He looked like an emaciated Santa in a green jumpsuit, his pale eyes distant but vaguely kind.

Will kept his attention on the room around him, painfully vigilant, making sure nothing came through the bars at them. The old-timer sank gratefully onto the metal bench in the cage and seemed to stare off at nothing, his spotted lips smacking every once in a while. Even in the rush to evacuate, the orderlies had had the compassion to cuff his gnarled hands in the front. Will couldn't help but notice his long, yellowed nails that looked more like an ancient owl's talons.

At last, the orderlies seemed to have everyone under control. Chilton came storming through once the inmates were secured in either cages or in wrist and ankle shackles. He reamed the

ward supervisor as he hurried across the tile floor, his shoes and cane clacking. “This is unacceptable, Mr. Scott, simply unacceptable! The orderlies will no longer have a break room if they can’t understand the basic operation of a toaster oven! And who thought to keep the boxes of paper towels right next to it?”

“I’m sorry, sir, apparently someone was trying to cook a quesadilla and the unit malfunctioned,” the supervisor explained in an even tone that suggested he was more than used to dealing with Chilton’s dramatic outbursts.

“Get those giant fans we put in the foyer when it’s wet out and blow that smoke clear. And dare I ask why the sprinkler system didn’t deploy? Then again, perhaps I should be grateful it didn’t. But if the fire marshall gets word of this…” Chilton and the supervisor rounded a corner and disappeared.

Will let out a sigh, shaking his head with a disbelieving chuckle.

“It was the *demons* .”

Will glanced down at the old-timer. All at once, realization pressed into his chest, a cruel and singular weighted knowledge. *That* was what he was going to become. Old and white-haired, hands shaky, half his teeth gone. And that was the best case scenario, if he avoided the death penalty. Age was undignified enough, but to age here, in this place, was more cruel than a needle in the arm or a seat in the electric chair.

Pieces of last night’s dream came back to him. Will could feel the execution chair beneath his body, the straps around his arms and legs, the searing agony of the current as it ripped through him. Simultaneously, he could feel the smooth knob of the switch, then the muscles of his arm tense and pull it down. He was both condemned and executioner.

He took a shaky breath and coughed again, his eyes watering. He blinked the tears back and rubbed the dampness away against the oily bars of the cage.

“Listen here, sonny. It was the demons trying to kill us.” The old man leaned closer to whisper confidentially up to Will where he stood, crammed in his corner of the cage. “Listen. No, shhh! Listen. C’mere.” He beckoned Will, who ignored his suggestion. The man went on anyway. “They look like people. They can look like anyone they want.”

Will thought of Angel-Maker. Did the old man have a brain tumor? If he did, it’d be a mercy, assuming it killed him faster than old age would.

“You can’t see them by looking,” the old man rasped, spittle flying from his lips. “You have to be chosen to know. Dr. Chilton is, but he’s of little consequence. There’s ranks of demons, a hierarchy, and Chilton’s barely mor’n a footsoldier. Fancies himself more important.”

You don’t say. Hannibal’s voice in his head, dry and sardonic.

“Now, you oughta know that foreigner who visits you is very powerful. High ranking. His real name is Asmodeus, and he’s a fallen angel of course, the Prince of Lechery. He’s the son of King David and a succubus.”

Will knew it was just the delusions of a man who was very likely a murderer, but the notion infected him nevertheless, the ambient pulse in his mind twitching awake. He tried to fight it, but it would not be denied. He stepped into the old man's thinking and it sucked him in, a quicksand of empathy. "The Keys of Solomon," Will murmured, his physical vision now blank, instead imagining a body spread out on a floor over one of the binding symbols, drawn in the victim's blood.

"Then you know!" The old man reached out with his cuffed hands and Will had the sense to shrink back, pressing himself even harder against the bars. He forced the vision of the old man's design away and snapped his mind back to the present. Will glanced behind him. The orderlies were removing inmates one by one to check them for injuries, and handcuffing them to stretchers to bring to the infirmary. No one was paying a lick of attention to the prisoners still in the visitation cages, crammed in two or three per tiny space.

"I've been waiting for so long." There were tears in the old man's eyes now, further clouding his irises. "Tell me your name, angel." He clasped his cuffed hands in front of him and raised them in a gesture of prayer. "Are you Michael? You're here to help me, aren't ya? Praise the Lord…"

Will sighed and shook his head. He was done indulging madness.

The silence didn't last long. "You best be careful," the old man warned, lifting a finger tipped with a bile-colored nail. "Asmodeus is recruiting for Hell. He'd love a prize like you. Of the deadly sins, he's the Prince of Lust, and he'd seduce a pretty little thing like you in a heartbeat, you hear me?"

"I'm not an angel," Will snapped, not sure where the resentment at the implication came from. Perhaps with himself. He should have kept his mouth shut. The old guy probably would have just fallen asleep or something. "And the people you killed weren't demons. You're in an institution because you're delusional. Are you taking your medication?"

"Those demon pills?" the old man scoffed.

Will sighed again, tilting his head back against the bars. He was getting a cramp in his calf standing this way, but didn't dare move, as it meant getting closer to his cellmate. "Can we hurry this shit up?" he called over his shoulder to the orderlies who were trying to subdue a man intent on head-butting everyone within a two-foot radius of himself.

"If you're not an angel," the old man muttered, his open expression folding into itself and molding into one of suspicion, "then you're one of *them* ,"

"I'm just a-a person. Just a human."

"There's only one way to find out." The old man was suddenly holding a slim piece of metal in his hand. It might have started life as part of a vent cover, but Will could see that one side of it had been honed to a razor edge. Before he could react, the old man lunged forward, slicing the piece of metal along the side of Will's thigh. Will cried out in pain and surprise, blood turning a strange purple shade as it soaked into the green jumpsuit. His first instinct was to stick his foot into the old man's neck and shove him back against the bars, applying

pressure until his attacker lost consciousness. But something about the lined face, the eyes so clouded to reality, the hands that shook with some kind of palsy even as they held the bloodstained weapon, caused him to pause.

“Well?” Will asked softly. “Am I human?”

The old man slipped the weapon back into his sleeve. “I’ll be damned,” he smiled. “Sorry about that, sonny. Had to be sure.”

“Understandable.” Will grimaced and examined the wound through the slice in his jumpsuit. The bleeding was slowing down already, though he could feel droplets flowing past his knee and down his calf.

“You still shouldn’t be talkin’ to Asmodeus,” the old man cautioned, leaning back and folding his hands on his knees. “He’s probably why you’re here.”

Will snorted a wry laugh. “You’re pretty perceptive, old timer.”

“He’ll let you out when he has a use for you. Better watch it. Maybe safer in here.”

“Yeah, we’ll see about that,” Will murmured.

“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he did not exist,” the old man said.

“That’s not from the Bible,” Will growled at him. “That’s from a *movie.”*

“It’s Baudelaire, sonny.”

Finally, a disheveled orderly unlocked the cage and shuffled the old man out, passing him off to a colleague who walked him back toward the cell block. The orderly returned and unlocked the door again, giving Will a once-over. “What happened to you?”

“Does it matter?”

“Guess not. Better have the doc look at it. C’mon.” The orderly stepped back and Will exited the cage, only to be taken by the arm and led to the infirmary. “Stay cool. There’s no room for another gurney in there, so if you want this looked at…”

“I get it,” Will said.

The infirmary was packed, as the orderly had promised, gurneys with prisoners handcuffed to the safety rails taking up most of the open space. The two permanent hospital-style beds were occupied, so the orderly led Will over to the exam table and told him to sit down. Will trembled for a moment, an involuntary reaction. The last time he’d been in this room had been as an investigator, using his barbed gift to get into Abel Gideon’s head, trying to determine if he was the Chesapeake Ripper or not.

“Don’t just dump him off here!” A doctor in teal scrubs shouted at the orderly from across the room where he was stitching up a split eyebrow.

The orderly sighed heavily and leaned against the table next to Will. “Know any jokes?” he asked.

“You mean besides this place?” Again, Will was engulfed in barely-contained chaos. Inmates writhed on their gurneys, yelling obscenities or just to make noise, some spitting on the nurses as they hustled from patient to patient. Others were still hacking from the smoke. One vomited over the side of his bed, causing his neighbor to do the same.

Will closed his eyes and tried to imagine the stream, or the Boundary Waters. Instead, all he could see was himself, as if he were an impartial observer, standing in Abel Gideon’s place. Over and over his mind forced him to relive killing the night nurse Abel had murdered, gouging out her eyes, strangling her, impaling her to create his own twisted version of the Wound Man.

It was over an hour before Will was treated by an indifferent nurse who cut a larger hole in his jumpsuit to look at the wound. She disinfected it quickly and slapped some butterfly bandages on it, then told the orderly to return Will to his cell.

The hallway still stank of acrid smoke, but fresh air was blasting through the vents, the HVAC working overtime. Will shivered, curling up in the fetal position on his bunk. The slice on his leg hurt, and he did his best not to jostle it as he tried to find a comfortable position on the bed.

He must have fallen asleep, but was awakened by a now-familiar voice. “Wake up, Mr. Graham.”

He opened his eyes and angled his head back to see who else but Ed and Sully waiting outside his cell with a gurney.

“Doc wants to see that leg wound again,” Sully explained, a knowing grin spreading across his sharp features.

Will coughed and spit into the sink before complying with their demands to take off his bloodstained jumpsuit and get on the gurney, where he was handcuffed to the safety rails on the side. They wheeled him quietly through the cell block. Will turned his head to check on the old man. He was curled up on his bunk with his folded hands resting under his head, peaceful as a child. No bad dreams for a righteous demon slayer.

The infirmary was deserted, the cacophony silenced. All of the surfaces gleamed as though they’d been sanitized. Ed and Sully wheeled him over to one of the hospital beds and transferred him into it, strapping down his wrists and ankles with cloth-covered restraints that could be adjusted for more or less movement as the medical professional desired. Sully told him to lay back and added another strap around his chest, buckling it tightly. Will had no choice but to recline his head back onto the cushioned surface beneath him and wait.

He didn’t wait long. Only moments after Sully and Ed retreated, locking the infirmary behind them, Hannibal appeared from behind a privacy screen. He was wearing scrubs, including a mask and gloves. Will watched as he approached on silent feet, and lowered his mask. Not

speaking, he unstrapped Will's chest restraint and lengthened the slack on the arm cuffs, allowing Will to sit up on the bed.

Hannibal removed the stethoscope from around his neck and put the ends in his ears, then approached Will with the flat piece. Will didn't move as Hannibal placed it against his chest, listening. He transferred it from one area to another, then brought it to his mouth, blowing on the metal to warm it before sliding it inside Will's shirt along his back. "Breathe in as deeply as you can," he said.

Will complied, then dissolved in a fit of coughing. Hannibal waited for it to die down, then went to the sink, returning with a plastic cup of water. Will drank it gratefully and handed it back. "Again, please." Hannibal replaced the stethoscope and Will took a few deep breaths.

"Did the doctor order a blood test?" Hannibal wanted to know, his voice even and soft, the perfect bedside manner.

"No," Will said.

"I'll call Chilton tomorrow and insist. Better yet, I'll have Alana ask. Frederick has a weakness for big blue eyes," Hannibal told him.

"Why a blood test?"

"We need to determine the amount of oxygen reaching your blood, as well as your levels of carbon monoxide and acid. Standard procedure for treating smoke inhalation."

"I feel fine," Will said.

"Humor me." Hannibal retrieved a bottle of oxygen from its storage place in a corner cabinet and hooked it up to a mask, then gently positioned it against Will's face. "Hold this, please. I need to examine your leg."

Will put his hand over the plastic mask and held it flush to his skin. The rush of pure oxygen made his head swim, giving over to a blast of euphoria. Hannibal carefully removed the hastily-applied butterfly bandages and disinfected the wound again before gluing it shut and placing a fresh bandage on top.

He took the oxygen mask from Will's hand and turned off the gas, moving the canister back to its storage cabinet, and then returned to put a gloved hand under Will's chin and shine a light into either eye. He lowered the light, but his hand lingered, moving to curve around the side of Will's jaw, thumb caressing his cheek. "I don't want you in here," he repeated, echoing himself.

In Will's mind, the lockbox jumped and rattled, his pain and antipathy banging against its prison, screaming from within, *YOU PUT ME HERE!* Will made his mental self pick up the box and hide it in the cellar of his house, shutting the door behind. This allowed him to smile up at Hannibal and lean into his touch. "I don't want to in be here, either," he said softly.

“It isn’t safe. Even locked away, you can still be in danger.” Hannibal’s dark eyes glanced down to the wound on Will’s leg. “You asked me what I would do to help you. How far I would go.” Hannibal stepped back and removed the gloves, depositing them in the trash.

“Now I know,” Will said with a little half-smile. “Burn down your professional reputation. Kill your chances of being taken seriously as a profiler. Perjury. Just a few little things.”

Hannibal returned his expression, though the smile didn’t last long. He lowered one of the safety rails on the hospital bed and sat next to Will, backed up against his hip and thigh. With a dissatisfied exhalation of a held breath, he took Will’s hand and stared down at it for a long moment before pressing a kiss into the scarred knuckles. “It wasn’t enough, it seems. Judge Davies wouldn’t even entertain the idea of your new defense.”

“Can’t blame him,” Will said, looking at their clasped fingers.

The little telltale line between Hannibal’s eyebrows deepened. Will tried to put his other hand on Hannibal’s back but was stopped short by the restraint. Hannibal glanced at Will’s arrested limb, watched him lower it back to the bed.

“Why did he hurt you?” Hannibal shifted to touch Will’s thigh above the wound. The connection was immediate and made the air thick, a sudden drop in barometric pressure. The hand lingered, a warm weight.

“The old man?” Will ran his free hand through his hair, then rubbed his stubble. “Just checking to make sure I’m not a demon.”

“Did you pass the test?”

“I did. But, ah, you failed… miserably.”

Amusement glinted in Hannibal’s eyes. “I did?”

“Yeah. He said you’re a prince of hell named Asmodeus. Chilton’s a demon, too, but, ah… no pedigree.”

“Better to be a prince in Hell than a slave in heaven,” Hannibal said, adjusting Milton’s words for the situation. The hand on Will’s thigh climbed up a few more inches, radiating heat.

Will took the hand he was holding and pressed it into his chest, over his heart. Hannibal used it to push him gently back against the hospital bed and leaned over him, slowly lowering his mouth to meet Will’s lips. The kiss was firm, a reassurance, and Will answered it with genuine insistence.

“You taste like smoke,” Hannibal murmured as they broke apart, eye to eye. “It blends well with you.” He leaned into Will’s neck and inhaled, nosing from Will’s throat up into his hair. “Perhaps your lawyer’s greatest faux pas was letting you wear that aftershave to court.”

Will snorted a silent laugh that turned into a muffled sound of assent as Hannibal kissed him again, harder this time. “I feel as though part of me is in this place with you,” Hannibal

confessed, expression soft, eyes tender as Will touched him however he could with the limited motion of the restraints. “You once described to me the feeling of being haunted by the previous owner of your home. While I can’t say I’ve misplaced items, or have dogs to bark at empty corners, I feel you like a ghost, Will.” He brought his mouth back to Will’s, pressing his tongue in and out before pulling back once more. “Your presence in my home, my office – invisible but constant.”

“Sometimes I feel like we’re doing the same thing at the same time.” Will shifted, allowing Hannibal to slide onto the narrow bed next to him, shivering as Hannibal’s hand traveled from the back of his knee along the expanse of his inner thigh, cool fingers against feverish skin. “Things like showering, getting dressed, laying down to sleep. It’s not Garret Jacob Hobbs anymore. It’s you.”

“A relief, I hope.”

Will nodded through the lie. To keep Hannibal from studying his expression too closely, he hid his face by tracing his lips along Hannibal’s neck until he was stopped by the collar of the scrub shirt, tongue darting out intermittently. “But I get the cuffs, you get the cufflinks.”

Hannibal pulled away and thumbed Will’s bottom lip before drawing his knuckles across his scratchy cheek. “It won’t be like this forever.”

“How do you know?”

“I won’t allow it.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “It’s that simple, huh?”

Hannibal didn’t answer, instead pausing to toe off his shoes and shift himself over Will, running a hand up beneath his tee shirt in a slow, longing caress. His fingertips glanced off of Will’s nipple and he gave a small but sharp intake of breath, feeling the blood rise to his face, among other areas. Hannibal’s hand slipped over the domain of his chest before easing down his belly and then lower still, pushing its way past his waistband and handling him with intention. With the restraints, Will could still reach Hannibal’s arm that supported him and the thigh positioned next to Will’s hip. He ran his fingers over what he could greedily, bunching the frustrating fabric as he went.

Hannibal’s hand moved back and a finger brushed his entrance before apparently thinking better of it.

“Yes,” Will insisted.

“I’m not going to injure you further,” Hannibal countered, pressing instead on an outer location that attempted to reach the same place.

“I want it,” Will argued. “What, you didn’t come prepared this time?”

“You think me so presumptuous.” Hannibal slid off of him and went over to some drawers near the exam table, rifling through them until he found a white tube of clinical, unromantic

lubricant likely used for prisoner prostate exams. He anointed his hand and Will generously and slipped a finger in. Will sighed, a sound of blissed contentment, even as he strained against the cuffs that circled his wrists and ankles. Hannibal unbuckled his legs swiftly to get Will's shorts out of their way, then trailed his tongue along Will's inner thigh, pausing to plant a kiss on the bandaged wound as he went.

The tongue continued until it found its way inside Will, aided intermittently by Hannibal's fingers. Will clamped down for a moment before forcing himself to relax, savoring the sensations, his breath coming faster now. He could just reach Hannibal's hair to run his fingers through it appreciatively. They were haunting one another, he realized as his thoughts surfaced every so often, breaching consciousness like sea creatures flinging themselves out of the water only to crash terrifically back into the depths.

Hannibal's ghost at his side, sometimes inhabiting his body, moments of possession. His ghost roamed the halls of Hannibal's shadowy house, pausing, perhaps, at the mantle beneath the antelope head, or lingering at the foot of Hannibal's bed, watching him sleep. Only together, in the same room, were they embodied, brought back to life, made real, a kind of transubstantiation.

"It's not enough," Will whispered through panted breaths.

Hannibal must have agreed, because he unzipped the scrubs and pushed them down far enough to expose himself momentarily before parting Will's legs and sliding in. He entered easily, only requiring one more thrust to bury himself to the hilt. Will adapted to him within seconds and closed his legs around Hannibal's, attempting to assist with each stroke. His enthusiasm seemed to have an intoxicating effect – Hannibal's face was bare and unmasked, his desire nakedly evident, his pleasure in Will's mirrored desire completely visible in the way he stared directly down at Will between frequent kisses that increased each time in violence, pure gluttony.

"Let me go," Will suggested, tugging fruitlessly at the restraints.

"Don't tempt me," Hannibal said through labored breaths.

"You want me– to tr-trust you. That goes –" Will was silenced by Hannibal's mouth over his again, Hannibal's teeth clamping down on his lower lip for a long moment, anchoring the movements of his hips. Will constricted his legs around Hannibal's pelvis now, holding him in but not allowing him to move. Hannibal let go of his lip with a soft growl, trying to push back. "Trust goes – both ways," Will managed as he strained to hold Hannibal's hips with his legs, at least until he finished his sentence.

He released his legs and Hannibal pulled out entirely. "Will," he pleaded.

"Let me go," Will insisted.

Will didn't think his ploy would work, but it did. Hannibal hurriedly unbuckled the wrist restraints, and Will was free.

As Hannibal turned him over roughly, barely waiting until Will got his elbows and knees under before entering again, he considered his options.

Maybe it was the certain approach of his climax as Hannibal repeatedly pressed against his inner pleasure center, but at this moment, Will didn't especially feel like killing Hannibal. He rationalized within moments; killing Hannibal would prove that Will was a conscious murderer and that would put him on death row or in a cell until he was as old and mentally feeble as the man he'd shared a cage with earlier that day. Convincing Hannibal to untie him was victory enough for now. Once he had a plan in place, an opportunity where he wouldn't condemn himself, he knew he could convince Hannibal again.

All men, he realized, had certain weaknesses. Even Hannibal Lecter.

You cloud my judgment, Will. You make me vulnerable.

This wasn't Hannibal's voice in his head replacing his inner monologue. This was a *memory* , floating up to his consciousness like the bloated bodies left behind by the Muralist, knocked loose from the rocks at the bottom of the water, rising to the surface and piercing it with truth.

Hannibal sat across from him in Will's kitchen, a severed ear and a length of tubing on the table in front of him. "You cloud my judgment, Will. You make me vulnerable."

Hannibal slowed and bent over Will, embracing him from behind. "Is this what you wanted?"

"Yes," Will breathed as Hannibal's lips found the back of his neck and his shoulder blade. "Don't stop." His voice was a rough half-whisper.

The angle was perfect, and Will climaxed in a sudden rush, burying his face in the cheap fabric of the hospital bed's mattress to muffle the sound.

Still panting, Will pushed up from his position and twisted to take Hannibal by the throat and shoulder. Hannibal tensed a moment but Will reassured him with a feverish kiss, then reversed their positions. He sank back onto Hannibal using his body weight, pausing for a moment to adjust to the new arrangement before tensing his legs and moving on his own, the hospital bed emitting little scolding squeaks.

How easy it would be, Will realized, to wrap his hands around Hannibal's neck in this position, and just squeeze until the light went out.

It was certainly a temptation, but so was Hannibal at this angle, all prey now, every vital part exposed from neck to groin, breathing heavily, gripping Will by his thigh and hip, hanging on for dear life. "Will," he begged under his breath.

The corner of Will's mouth pulled up ever so slightly, though his thighs burned from the exertion. Hannibal seemed to sense it and held him by the hips, rolling up into him of his own volition now. His grip hardened, and if he wasn't careful, Will would have some very telltale bruises that might raise questions.

Hannibal tensed and filled his lungs as if he would cry out. Will leaned over and clamped a hand over his mouth before any sound escaped, then gently removed it as Hannibal dissolved into panting breaths, the tension in his body bleeding away.

Will splayed himself over Hannibal's body, the scrubs an impediment to touch, but not to Hannibal's scent, sweeter and much more defined after his climax.

The moment didn't last long, as Hannibal seemed to sense some kind of impending danger, whether from Will or somewhere else. He got up and shifted Will back beneath him, replacing his underwear and the wrist and ankle restraints before retrieving a cloth to clean them up. He adjusted his scrubs and Will's clothing, and it was like the connection they'd just shared had been severed. They were on their way to being ghosts again.

Hannibal sat at his side and ran his fingers through Will's hair. "I had a dream," Will said, "where the door to my cell was open. I, ah, I went into the hallway… and you called me back. You wanted me back behind bars."

Hannibal's face went from adoring satisfaction to one of regret. "Part of you still suspects me," he said hollowly.

"I don't think I'll have any more dreams like that," Will reassured him, leaning into Hannibal's hand as it traversed his cheek to his jaw.

"No?"

"You saw it for yourself," Will reminded him. "You let me out and…" He trailed off with a half smile. "All I wanted to do was…"

There were muffled voices in the hallway, and a jingling of keys. Hannibal got swiftly to his feet and replaced his mask. "I miss you, Will," he said softly before disappearing behind the screen just as Ed and Sully came in to collect their human cargo.

Will let Hannibal's confession flutter through his mind, something rare with beautiful wings, until he was deposited back in his cell. Then he crushed it, leaving broken carrion behind. Because Beverly wasn't working fast enough. It was time to offer Dr. Chilton the same deal. That meant denying Hannibal any power over Will as his therapist. It was time. Before he forgot the reason he'd been condemned to rot here in the first place.

…and CUT!

Now, start the show again, and assume Hannibal pretty much heads right over to the judge's chambers after seeing Will and dispenses with the justice! The next scene in the show depicts the courthouse janitor finding the judge's body with his brain, eyes, and heart removed. Jack and Hannibal show up to the crime scene, and Hannibal says, "Not only is justice blind, it is mindless and heartless." The judge was shot in the heart, which was removed, and the shell

casing recovered, preventing a ballistics match to the bailiff, but it seems like the same killer. The goal of the killing was a mistrial, meaning that Will has been spared the death penalty… for now. And we really know how far Hannibal will go to help Will.

…stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 4: Takiawase

Chapter Summary

Will makes a deal with Dr. Chilton -- in exchange for his complete cooperation with all the tests and therapy recommended, Chilton will become Will's sole therapist, and will agree not to discuss anything about Will with Hannibal Lecter. Shot full of truth serum is not the best time to have a run-in with Hannibal, but that's what happens later that night.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Waiting Game” by BANKS

“I’m thinking it over
The way you make me feel all sexy but it’s causing me shame
I wanna lean on your shoulder
I wish I was allowed but I don’t wanna cause any pain
And if I’m feeling like I’m evil, we got nothing to gain..
I’m thinking it over
What if the way we started made it something cursed from the start?
What if it only gets colder?
Would you still wrap me up and tell me that you think this was smart?
‘Cause lately I’ve been scared thinking ‘bout where we are…
I don’t wanna say your love is a waiting game…”

This “cut unscene” occurs just after Will’s session with Dr. Chilton where he is given sodium amytal, a tongue-loosening truth serum. The combination of the medication and a flickering overhead light causes Will to remember Hannibal shooting him up with some kind of drugs and inducing seizures, causing his blackouts and missing time to be much worse than what the encephalitis alone would do. He explains his memory to Chilton, who says, “That would be a radically unorthodox form of therapy” to which Will replies, “Yes, it would.” This next bit begins at 26:45 as the sodium amytal Will was given continues to run its course.

“I wonder what Dr. Lecter will have to say for himself?” Chilton tapped his pen against his notepad. Will winced. The sound reverberated through the subterranean interview room and each pulse felt like ragged claws against his ears. The details of the space slowly drained away, leaving the shadows deep and sharp-edged. Chilton on the chair in front of him seemed like a lone island of brightness, an actor on a stage lit by a monologue spotlight.

“H-he won’t s-say anything.” Will’s tongue was wet and heavy like spring snow. “Because you won’t talk to him about me or my therapy.”

“Will, I think-“

“That’s what we *agreed* ,” Will said forcefully. He shook his head, trying to clear the clouds from his perception. “Don’t talk to him. Don’t let him near me.”

“Of course, Will. Just as we agreed.” Chilton had no features now, only shadows and contrast, over-saturated. “Now, tell me more about how Dr. Lecter treated you.”

The truth bubbled up behind his lips, stretching down the back of his throat. Will fought against it, keeping his jaw locked. Behind Chilton, the dingy wall and doorway leading to the hall beyond dissolved the way an old movie might show a transition into a dream sequence or an underwater kingdom, wavy like sunlight on the bottom of the ocean. Figures slowly came into focus, black and white, a vintage memory. He saw himself kneeling on Hannibal’s bed, reaching for him, inhaling his scent and then leaning in for that first drunken kiss. *The one who got away,* Abigail’s voice echoed through the scene, a narrator to his drug-fuelled reminiscence.

Chilton was saying something, but it was muffled, inaudible. Will shook his head violently, sweat dripping from his brow, and tried to focus his eyes. “What?” he muttered.

“I asked you what else you talked about with Dr. Lecter during these little ‘conversations’... I understand you discussed the cases and the killers?” Chilton crossed his legs and rested the notepad on his knee. “Did he ask you to identify with these despicable monsters? Encouraged you to find some empathy, some common ground? Do you think that influenced your desire to kill?”

“Jack wanted me to look. Han– Dr. Lecter – he wanted me to-to *stop* . I-I… I *wanted* to look. I wanted to help.” Nausea swept him as the IV poured the poison into his veins, making the room spin. The black and white scene behind Chilton had changed. Now it was the storage room in the cellar of the Baltimore State Hospital, and he could see Hannibal’s back, muscles rippling beneath his skin as he thrust into Will. His other self throwing his head back and moaning in satisfaction, knuckles pale as he gripped the pipe behind his head. *Name the bait on your hook after somebody you cherished.*

“I’m the bait,” Will murmured, his breathing coming faster now, heart thundering behind his ears.

“What’s that?” Chilton’s voice rose through the primeval thudding in his head.

“What was the question?” Will managed through deflating lungs.

“I asked if you felt like Dr. Lecter breached the doctor-patient relationship. You’ve both referred to one another as friends having conversations. How personal was your relationship, exactly?”

The movie his mind projected on the wall behind Chilton changed scenes again with another old-timey blur transition. Will saw himself in bed with Hannibal, the morning after their second encounter. The table by the fireplace bore the remnants of their omelets, and steam rose gently from a pair of coffee cups. The breakfast was, however, abandoned, and Hannibal was kissing the space beneath Will's navel, moving his mouth lower in tantalizing increments before sliding his tongue along Will's length and taking him in. *Swallowing the bait.*

"W-we had drinks once. I– I caught a fish, and he cooked it."

"Just a few little social calls?" Chilton raised a skeptical eyebrow.

Will forced himself to nod, a sweaty lock of hair falling over his damp forehead. Despair swelled within him as the vision behind Chilton shifted again, dark at the edges like a vignette or a silent film degraded by time. The hotel room in Bloomington, Minnesota bled into view and he was forced to watch as Hannibal encircled him from behind in the tenderest of embraces, a hand over Will's heart, lips at his neck. Will could feel that body now, shielding him, holding him close, protectively.

His name, an invocation. *Will.*

Hannibal Lecter has no reason other than his own amusement and curiosity. His words to Beverly intruded on the scene, souring it. He teared up, the despair gathering under his jawline, constricting his tongue.

"I suppose that's no more than usual for an acquaintance of Hannibal's," Chilton droned on, writing something on his notepad.

"Amusement and curiosity," Will said before he could stop himself. He couldn't breathe. His heart was breaking again, right now, as the drugs forced him to relive it all, tearing down the mental barriers he'd erected for his own sanity.

I let you into my body. Fucking me for fun, j-just because you could – I mean, did you even want me, or was it part of the g-game? Wind me up and see what you could get me to do? See how much I'd let you do to me?

"And how about your past, Will? How deeply did Hannibal dive into you?"

"Dive into me?" Will stuttered.

"Dive into it," Chilton either repeated or corrected himself, Will didn't know which.

"I told him about my mother." Will couldn't stop his words before they came out. He clamped down in his mind and shut his mouth.

"What about her?"

Will took a measured breath, trying to ignore the vision behind Chilton. It had changed again. Hannibal's bedroom, after they'd made love, sitting on the bed with their legs twined, Hannibal's hand on his.

Why did you keep the secret so long?

Because she was my mother.

"She left when I was five," Will said. "I barely knew her. That's all."

Chilton studied him with canny eyes. "Nurse?" he said after a stretch of observational silence. "Please increase Mr. Graham's dosage."

"What? Why?" Will demanded, straining unconsciously against the straps that held his wrists and ankles to the chair.

"I believe you're being less than forthcoming." Chilton crossed his legs again and switched the notepad to the opposite knee. "Not exactly what we agreed upon, is it?"

"No, no, no," Will said rapidly as the nurse tipped up the small bottle of sodium amytal and filled the syringe again. He turned back to Chilton, rage blazing through his veins. "Mom left when I was five and dad fixed boat motors – we moved around a lot and I had a dog named Bandit, what the fuck else do you need to know?"

"Please, Will, there's no need for abusive language." Chilton nodded to the nurse, and she stabbed the needle into the IV port and pressed in the plunger.

"Shit," Will murmured as the world slid off a plate and splattered at his feet. The nurse lifted his head as it drooped, and shone a light in his eyes, one and then the other. She nodded to Chilton and withdrew.

"What else do you remember about your sessions with Hannibal?" Chilton clicked the pen's tip in and out twice. It sounded like the cocking of a gun, an audible threat.

"The lights. In-injections." Will shook his head and swallowed down his nausea. He could feel the ghost of Hannibal's touch on his wrist as he put the needle oh so gently into the crook of Will's elbow. Then Hannibal's lips over the injection site, kissing the sting away. Those same lips on his in the shower, the water cascading around them, wrapping their damp bodies in steam. The wall behind Chilton became that steam, a New England fog obscuring its entire surface. Little by little, shapes emerged, grayscale. He saw himself in Hannibal's arms, hair slicked back with water. Will watched himself slide out of Hannibal's grip and get on his knees, lips poised and rosy with desire.

The mist came again, obscuring the scene. A silhouette stalked from one side of the room to the other, threading its shadow through the fog. The edges sharpened, and the outline of the stag emerged. Will squeezed his eyes shut and let his head droop down, chin against his chest. He slumped in the chair, the cuffs the only thing keeping him upright.

"You've given him too much!" Chilton snapped at the nurse. "Will. Will, wake up."

Will didn't move. The dark tableau behind his eyes continued, showing him a kaleidoscope of his affair with Hannibal in dreamy succession. Hannibal tying him to the bed, Hannibal tearing his clothes off in passionate fury, his hand on Hannibal's outline as he drove the

Bentley. Cruelest of all came a long stretch of images where he re-lived every moment of Hannibal taking his virginity.

“Oh, well done,” Chilton said somewhere in the distant darkness, his words barbed with sarcasm. “I suppose, by necessity, I must end the session. What’s your name? Nurse Thompson, I will see you in my office for a formal reprimand tomorrow morning at nine sharp!”

Will could hear the clatter of a gurney being wheeled into the room. Rough hands unstrapped him from the chair and hauled him up, then tossed him onto the waiting bed. He resisted out of instinct, trying to tear his arms from the hands that held him, kicking out and arching his back, but his body was uncoordinated, his brain thick and syrupy. Handcuffs closed around his wrists, cuffing him to the safety rails of the gurney. He struggled fruitlessly for a few moments before giving in and laying back. Were his eyes closed? He couldn’t tell. His vision was clouded with pulsing red-black and his chest felt crushed, pressed under heavy stones as some kind of draconian, puritanical torture.

Sensation of movement. Buzz as cell block doors were opened. Clatter of orderlies’ keys. Murmur of the old-timer’s voice. “What’d you filthy demons do to ‘im, huh? Come in here and try that on me and I’ll send you back to hell!”

The orderlies now, as though underwater. “Just leave him. He’s passed out. It’ll be easier to move him if he’s awake.”

“Works for me.”

The clang of his cell door closing, and then subterranean quiet and definite darkness.

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Will woke up in his bed. The cell loomed around him, strangely large and shadowy, as if it had something to hide. He sat up one vertebrae at a time, and lowered his feet to the floor.

“Here we are again, despite my best efforts.”

It was Hannibal’s voice. Will turned to the door of the cell. The dingy cinder block hallway had been replaced with Hannibal’s bedroom, as if the cell had been transported there. Will stood slowly and stalked forward, wrapping his hands around the bars.

Hannibal was there, all right. In his bedroom with Will. Will stared at his other self that stood at the edge of the bed and looked at Hannibal, who came forward from the doorway, loosening his tie. Behind him, the decorative set of armor in the hallway gleamed in the soft lighting.

“If that’s your best effort…” the other Will shrugged with a flirtatious smile. He took the tie from Hannibal’s hands and slipped it over his head before tossing it to the side carelessly, as if tempting Hannibal to protest but knowing he wouldn’t. “I don’t think you were trying very hard.”

I take off his jacket next, the Will behind the bars thought, and he was right. The other Will slid Hannibal out of his suit jacket and tossed that, too, daring Hannibal to say or do something about it. Hannibal responded by taking Will roughly by the hips and turning him around, twisting one arm behind. The other hand crept around his middle and splayed out against Will's stomach, then slid up along his sternum, pressing him backwards into the hold. Hannibal's lips climbed along the side of his neck.

"This isn't a dream," the Will behind the bars said aloud, heart lodged in his throat. "This is a memory."

Will remembered this day. It was during the totem case. Hannibal had come to his house to check in after Will lost time at the crime scene. He'd ended up driving three hours in a fugue state, arriving at Hannibal's doorstep a few days before. It was the next morning after he and Alana had talked in his classroom about the kiss. Another day he'd lost time.

But this act, these moments – he'd forgotten? No, he had a photographic memory. This happened during the blackout. He'd lost the entire day between when Hannibal talked him into a trip to Baltimore, and when he'd woken up in the middle of something quite intimate many hours later.

Will closed his eyes, sensed his heart quicken against Hannibal's palm. He melded himself to the other version of him, joining their consciousness. When he opened his eyes, he was no longer behind the bars, but inhabiting the body of the Will from the memory. He felt the ivory points of Hannibal's teeth press into his flesh and braced for them to penetrate the skin and sink beneath the surface. Instead, Hannibal laughed gently and nuzzled the place he'd almost bitten. "Your heart's pounding already."

Will smirked and spun out of his hold — knowing that Hannibal had allowed it, of course — and caught Hannibal's wrists in his hands, pressing their foreheads together. "Don't even try to tell me yours isn't."

Hannibal leaned in and put his lips tenderly against Will's mouth. "Of course it is — but the chase excites me far more than the conclusion. A cat can play with a mouse for hours before eating it."

"Is that so?" Will asked playfully, letting one of Hannibal's arms free just so he could pull a handful of gray-brown hair, tilting his chin up and exposing his throat for kissing.

Hannibal let out a barely audible but clearly helpless little moan in response to Will's lips and tongue moving along the smooth flesh that connected his shoulder to his neck. It was his turn for a teasing almost-bite.

Suddenly, Will broke off and turned with a flippant smile towards the bed, abandoning Hannibal completely. "Come on, if you're coming," he said over his shoulder.

"I think you'll be the one coming." Hannibal caught up with him, and thrust him against the wall next to the bed, nearly upsetting the nightstand. Hannibal trapped him there with his hips, crushing their mouths together. Will shifted his weight in a quick reversal and caught Hannibal flat-footed; it was enough to toss him against the bed. Will barely had a chance to

gloat before Hannibal pulled him onto the bed and straddled him, pinning both wrists to the mattress. He pressed his lips feverishly against Will's throat, moving them up to his mouth.

Will came up for air. "Let's play a game," he proposed between his labored breaths.

"I think we're already playing." Hannibal slipped his hand down Will's gray jeans after pushing his loose shirt out of the way of the waistband.

Will arched his back and inhaled sharply, but caught Hannibal's wrist before he could go further. "You said you wanted to be a cat."

"What game do you propose?"

Will squirmed under him. "The one we played the first day we met."

"A game of inference," Hannibal recalled, unbuttoning the front of Will's shirt further to expose more of his collarbone.

"We try to guess things about each other." Will caught Hannibal's hands in his own. "You make an observation. If you get it right, you get to take something off of me. Then it's my turn."

Hannibal smiled openly and let Will anchor his hip and flip him over. Will settled on Hannibal's chest, blanketing him with the length of his body, playing with the buttons on the vest he was wearing over a white oxford. He folded his hands on Hannibal's sternum and rested his chin on them. Hannibal put his hands through the dark strands of his hair. "Let's play, then," he conceded.

"I'll go first." Will licked his lower lip. "You plan out your day down to the minute. You even, ah, plan for flexible time. In case something comes up."

Hannibal ran his fingers down Will's cheek, emitting a gentle sound as the pads dragged over his stubble. "Correct."

"I knew it." Will sat up and took off Hannibal's shoes, tossing them heedlessly away.

Hannibal drew him closer again and Will perched on his hips, Hannibal's hands caressing his thighs through the denim. "You," he said, "have spent the cost of your house on medical care for your dogs."

Will laughed disbelievingly. "Uhm… well, it gets expensive. Max had cancer. Buster broke his leg and got an infection. Zoe's, uh, diabetic, so…" He chuckled. "Correct."

Hannibal turned him over and removed his shoes and socks both. "Cheater," Will chastised him. Hannibal pulled his own socks off, which didn't directly match his tie but echoed the same color palate.

"Better?"

“Even Steven. Your turn.” His word was twisted in his mouth as Hannibal fondled him through his clothing, none too gently. “Stop cheating,” he panted, trying to catch Hannibal’s wrist again. Hannibal picked up one of Will’ s feet and started rubbing it. Will tried to ignore the treatment. “You don’t own a single tee-shirt. And I’m willing to bet you’ve never worn one by choice.”

Hannibal dropped his foot back to the bed. “Right again.”

“Come here.”

Hannibal complied, climbing over Will so he could unbutton the starched shirt and slide it free. Hannibal undid his own cuffs, taking a cue from Will and dropping the shirt to the floor with no ceremony. Will slid his fingers through Hannibal’s chest hair, thumbing his nipple appreciatively.

“Now who’s cheating?” Hannibal pressed in for a kiss, trying to get at the buttons of Will’s shirt again.

Will pushed his hand away. “Can’t change the rules in the middle.”

Hannibal dropped his head for a moment with a sigh that mixed bemusement with frustration. “All right. You lost your virginity to that college girlfriend whose feet you massaged. You were perhaps 20, or 21.”

Will’s brows shot up, and he felt a blush creep along his jawline, then rise to his cheekbones. “Late bloomer,” he said softly.

“Making up for lost time.” Hannibal unbuttoned Will’s plaid shirt and Will sat up to let him strip it away. Hannibal trailed his tongue, hot and wet, from Will’s nipple up over his collarbone, then to the tip of his chin. “Hurry, Will, I can’t wait much longer.”

“You think about home.”

Hannibal froze suddenly. Will shrank back at the look on his face, which seemed both angry and vulnerable. It passed after a moment, emboldening Will to speak again. “You never talk about it, but you think about it.”

Hannibal climbed off of him and lay on his back. Will sat up and kissed him. “I’m sorry, was that –”

“You’re right,” Hannibal admitted. “I should never forget how perceptive you are.”

“I shouldn’t have, ah…”

Hannibal ran a hand through Will’s hair and cupped his cheek. “Home isn’t just a place. It’s the people there, the time of life. My home doesn’t exist anymore. It won’t exist again until I build another one.”

Will didn’t realize the words were on his tongue until they spilled out in an insistent rush. “Build it with me.”

Hannibal looked up at him, brow furrowed in surprise, dark eyes shimmering in the soft lighting.

“I never had one – ah, a home, I mean. Not really. Wasn’t just that we moved constantly, it was – like you said.” Will took a breath and moistened his lower lip before pressing them together. “I think we could,” he said, then went quiet, painfully aware of what his confession meant. His head was pounding, his pulse a constant tide of pain behind his eyes.

“Say what you mean, Will.”

“I can’t. I shouldn’t.”

Hannibal sat up and eased Will beneath him, planting a kiss against his mouth. “Will,” he said. “Speak.”

“I have feelings for you,” Will blurted out, overcome by the terror of the truth, his voice barely above a whisper but then steadily getting louder as he rambled. “I-I know we’re just friends and I know we keep getting into these situations, and I know that I-I’m part of the problem because I’m clutching for balance–” now that he’d begun, he couldn’t stop. “And there’s no definition for what this is, and with Jack and the murders and, shit, you’re my *therapist* for all intents and purposes and it’s stupid – I should be able to – *not* have this happen. But it happened. It’s been happening and– I can’t make it stop.” He let out an agonized sigh. “It’s too late. I can’t take it back, I can’t pretend it doesn’t exist.”

Will shut his mouth with a wince, simultaneously horrified at what he’d just confessed and euphoric at the prospect of giving voice to everything he’d been feeling since Hannibal came into his life. Just like pulling the trigger and ending Garret Jacob Hobbs, there was no way to take it back, no way to *unsee* .

Hannibal didn’t respond vocally, but his body did. He shifted his posture with purpose so Will could feel the pressure against his thigh. He brushed Will’s hair back from his forehead before indulging in a long kiss that varied in invasiveness and force, lasting for many savoring moments. When it broke, Hannibal undressed Will the rest of the way, then himself, bringing the surfaces of their skin together again.

“I guess the game’s over.” Will tried on a mischievous smile, but it didn’t fit.

“It is. But I want you to know that I have a desire to give your offer serious consideration.” He reached down and gathered Will to himself in one hand and gave only one tantalizing thrust, leaving Will at his mercy for a moment. "I believe you would have offered this to me sooner if you felt your worth. Believed it."

Will considered, which was difficult since Hannibal had rutted against him again, and the sensations were maddening.

"You've felt broken. You've been told you are. You took Alana's rebuff to heart, assumed I felt the same way."

Another thrust, and another in quick succession. Will tossed his head back and gasped, fingers alternately caressing and digging into Hannibal's bicep and back. "The Japanese practice an art form called *kintsugi, m*ending broken pottery with veins of gold. So that, in the end, it is more beautiful than before. Its scars come to life.”

Will felt tears rise to his eyes. "Hemingway said, 'the world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.’”

"So you shall be, Will."

Will kissed him feverishly, moaning into his mouth as Hannibal thrust again. "I want you to be my home," he whispered, the last word contorted with pleasure.

“So many sweet things you’ve said.” Hannibal was looking down at him, breath tickling his lips, their mouths inches apart.

Within that moment, Will left his memory body and found himself once again standing behind the bars of his cell, watching at a distance at the two figures on the bed.

Hannibal’s fingers drifted over the other Will’s brow, smoothing back his hair. “Say it again. Tell me again, Will.”

The other Will stared up at him, eyes wide, and whispered, “What did I say?”

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“Will.”

Will slowly rose to the surface, his vision transitioning from cinematic black to a drab, institutional gray ceiling, bathed with a sickly light. He felt drunk, fuzzy-headed, limbs like sand, soaked in sweat. He was on a gurney, handcuffed to the safety rails. Swiveling his heavy head, he saw Hannibal Lecter standing at his bedside, wearing dark pants and a shirt that was abnormally casual for him, but still had a collar. Over it was a white attendant’s coat.

“Hannibal?” he asked hesitantly, scanning his surroundings. Icy fingers gripped his heart. It was the storeroom again. He was alone with the man that had drugged him and purposely induced seizures, egging on the blackouts and the lost time and the hallucinations. *Wind me up and watch me go* , he thought bitterly. And yet, here, looking inexplicably perfect in the poor lighting and foreign clothes, was the man he’d wanted to build a home with.

That person wasn’t real. The furious, hissing voice came from the lockbox inside his head where he’d mentally forced all of his antipathy and pain, a survival technique for navigating his continued contact with Hannibal, a necessity for keeping him close in order to bring him down, someway, somehow. *That was yet another mask. There were layers of them, and you never made it to the skin and bone.*

No, his heart argued. *There were times where I did.*

“Will, what happened?” Hannibal put a concerned hand on his where it gripped the safety rail of the gurney with white knuckles.

“Is this r-real?” Will tried to sit up, but everything felt so heavy, like he was laying under a lead blanket.

Hannibal paused, running his thumb along the back of Will’s hand. “Do you want it to be?”

“I don’t know,” he heard his mouth say, and cold dread seeped into his heart and lungs, weighing down his voice. It was the truth, because it had to be the truth. He couldn’t stop it.

Hannibal examined the mark on Will’s hand where the IV had been inserted. “My contacts tell me Dr. Chilton met with you tonight. What did he give you, Will?”

Don’t tell him! “Sodium amytal.” The words left his lips before he could stop them, heart thrumming in his ears.

Hannibal let go of Will’s hand and reached into his breast pocket, withdrawing a penlight. He shone it into Will’s eyes, first one, then the other. “It seems to still be in effect,” he noted casually, replacing the light.

Panic sweat broke out over Will’s already damp brow. *Have to fight it,* he told himself.

“What kinds of things did Dr. Chilton ask you?” Hannibal inquired, taking Will’s hand again. His touch was in no way comforting.

“H-he wanted to know – about you,” Will managed, halting himself as much as he could.

“What did he want to know about me?”

“How you t-treated me, m-my therapy, my, uh, my family…”

“And what did you tell him?” Hannibal’s eyes had gone dead, glassy and impersonal, like the eyes of the antelope above his fireplace. He lifted a finger to brush one lock of sweaty hair out of Will’s eye.

“I told him I remember.” Will jerked his free hand against the restraints, wishing he could physically clamp it over his mouth. The room was spinning and he felt nausea clawing behind his jaw.

“What do you remember, Will?”

Fight it, or die. Those are your choices.

Will lost the battle for his tongue against the sodium amytal. “You drugged me and used the lights to give me seizures,” he gasped out before panting in several panicked breaths.

He’s going to kill you. Hannibal had gone preternaturally still, his face no more emotive than the bust of a long-dead conqueror gathering dust in a museum. What Will said next would determine his fate.

“But Chilton – h-he made Abel Gideon believe he was the Chesapeake R-ripper.” Will turned his hand in Hannibal’s to grip it more tightly.

“Do you think he’s implanting memories in you?” Hannibal tilted his head to one side, gone from terrifyingly emotionless to intrigued.

“He knows how to do it.” That wasn’t a lie, so it was easy enough to say, even with the drugs saturating his blood.

Hannibal seemed to consider. “Frederick should know living in a glass house is reason enough not to throw stones,” he said.

Will gave him a pained smile. “This is, ah, Chilton we’re talking about.”

“Indeed.” Hannibal seemed to consider. “Did you consent to this?”

“He put some papers in front of me, and-and I signed them.” Also not a lie, just a sin of omission. Will forced himself to relax and breathe. This could work, if he was very, very lucky. “His nurse gave me too much and I-I must have passed out for awhile until your *friends* brought me h-here.”

“Will.” Hannibal’s voice was softer now. “Don’t sign anything else Chilton puts in front of you, do you understand?”

Will nodded, letting his eyes drift shut for a few moments. Hannibal pressed a cool hand against his forehead, then smoothed back his damp hair. “Can you sit up?”

Will took Hannibal’s offered hand. Hannibal slid his arm around Will’s back and helped him rise. “If I release you, will we be safe?”

“Yes,” Will promised. He was far too sluggish and lightheaded to be a match for Hannibal, but being free would up his chances if need be. Hannibal produced a key ring from the stolen coat and unlocked the cuffs. Will swung his legs over the side and stepped down on the floor only to cling to the side of the gurney, trying to get his sea legs as the world pitched and sank beneath him.

“I imagine you fought the drug’s effects.” Hannibal stood at Will’s side, but broke the touch connection. “And Frederick overcompensated.”

“Yeah, I fought.” Will kept his grip on the cool metal of the safety bar, squeezing it tightly. “I-I don’t think he suspects… *this*... but I-I kept… I didn’t say a word.”

“I applaud your efforts.”

Will took a shaky breath and put his other hand on the railing as well, bending his body and lowering his head. He was starting to feel a little more grounded. Standing and moving around was certainly helping.

As if he was a tide pulled by the moon, Hannibal inched closer. Closer, so that when Will did lift his head and straighten his shoulders, Hannibal was right behind him. He could feel the heat of Hannibal’s living body hovering around him like a halo, an aura. Hannibal slowly put his hands on Will, reaching around to splay his fingers out on his chest over his heart, the other curling so gently around his throat. Hannibal applied just the lightest pressure, and Will

was pliable under his touch after a breath or two, allowing Hannibal to press their bodies together, letting the side of his face come to rest against Will's ear and hair. They lingered in this embrace, Hannibal's fingers moving up Will's throat to lift his chin and expose his neck, breathing deeply of his scent. Will closed his eyes to relish the sensations, to make them last, to lose himself in them. If he had his way, if Chilton came through for him, this could very well be the last time. Once he cut Hannibal off as his therapist, there'd be no reason for him to be on the grounds. Perhaps he wouldn't risk coming anymore.

The thought was simultaneously a comfort and a source of inexplicable anguish.

No. He was a fool. Pumped full of truth serum and he was still capable of lying to himself. Hannibal would find a way. Of this, Will was certain. Just as certain was the knowledge that Hannibal would kill again. Who was next, he wondered, that Hannibal could silence forever the way he'd silenced Abigail?

He loved a murderer. Had wanted to build a home with a monster. Still wanted to, deep down, despite everything.

It had to stop. *It all had to stop* .

But not right now.

Hannibal let go and stepped back. "I shouldn't have done that."

"Why not?" Will turned to face him, ravaged by the current of sorrow that flowed through him with such force that he was sure it was evident on his face.

"You're still under the effects of Chilton's clumsy therapy."

"Yeah, well…" Will reached out to touch Hannibal's arm just above the elbow. "I can't lie. So ask me."

"Will, the first thing you asked me was if what you were seeing was real. You're not in the right place."

"Really?" He took a furious breath and dragged the heel of his hand across his cheek. "Why else did you come here? We know how this ends, it's how it ends every time, so w-why… *pretend* otherwise?"

Hannibal's hand closed around his throat as a warning, cutting off his words. "Quiet," Hannibal ordered with calm, deadly poise, such a contrast to the roiling sea inside of Will. "This room isn't soundproof." Will dropped his hands to his sides and Hannibal slowly relaxed his hold, until his fingers only held the pulsing flesh with the lightest pressure, perhaps, Will thought, unable to stop himself from savoring the warmth, the feel of Will's pulse under his skin.

Will's face was immobile, as was his body, but a tear, then another, flowed from his left eye. They curved around his jaw, wetting the back of Hannibal's hand. When he spoke, his voice

was soft but sure. “I just want to feel something *else* . Something besides numb, or terrified, or guilty, or hopeless.” He took a shaky breath. “Please, ask me.”

Hannibal’s hand left Will’s throat and settled on his damp, flushed cheek, thumb brushing away the next tear that fell. “Chilton fumbling around in your head could only have made things worse for you, Will. Your pain is palpable.”

“Then make it stop,” Will whispered, leaning into his hand, pressing it to his face with one of his own. “Or make it hurt somewhere else.”

Every nerve in Will’s body was taut, fiery, as he reached for Hannibal, sliding his touch along the place where his shirt met his waistband, one warm finger snaking beneath the fabric to touch his skin. “Ask me,” he requested, so softly he could barely hear his own voice.

“Will.”

Will tried to move closer, but Hannibal’s hand went back to his neck, holding him at a distance. “Please,” he whispered one last time. “I can only tell you the truth right now.”

At last, Hannibal relented. “Do you want me?”

“Yes.”

Slowly, Hannibal let his fingers leave Will’s neck and wind behind his head, twisting into his hair, the other stealing out to take Will around the small of his back. And then they came together, and Will’s mouth demanded his as he threw his arms around Hannibal’s neck in a feverish embrace. Will drowned in his scent, his incredible warmth, the taste of his lips. Hannibal broke their kiss and ran his mouth down along Will’s throat as he exhaled in sudden ecstasy, fumbling clumsily with the buttons of Hannibal’s shirt. Hannibal took his hands away, swept him up in a sudden lift and deposited him on the mattresses on the floor of the store room. Will reached for him, but Hannibal stood and moved out of his reach.

“You’re sure?” Hannibal paused. “This is what you desire?”

“You are what I fucking desire, now get over here,” Will demanded, kicking off his prison-issue shoes and wiggling free of jumpsuit and shirt, leaving him in his shorts. He got on his knees on the makeshift and held out a hand. “Ask me again and you’ll know it’s the truth.”

“That’s not necessary.” Hannibal’s voice was neutral, with maybe the tiniest glimmer of good humor. He approached with deliberate slowness, a satisfied half-smile playing over his mouth at Will’s insistence. Hannibal knelt and put his hands on either side of Will’s face and lifted his lips to meet his softly, then with more intensity. Will embraced him tightly and Hannibal murmured in assent as Will abandoned his mouth to kiss his immobile throat, its pulse strangely calm, even. Hannibal ran his hands over the litany of scars on Will’s shoulders and chest, thumbing the bullet wound that Jack had given him, then traced his fingers along the cuts of his muscle, to the satin skin of his inner elbow, and then his wrist, lifting it to his lips as Will tongued his collarbone and slipped some of his buttons free one-handed.

Hannibal opened his mouth and ran his lips along the inside of Will's wrist, tantalizing, teasing. Will sighed into his neck, clutching desperately against Hannibal's shoulder, opening his pants with one hand and fondling him with firm purpose. Hannibal kissed the raw spots where the cuffs had chafed as Will lifted his head away from his shoulder and looked him in the face. Hannibal's fingers explored the line of his collarbone, the hollow of his throat, then slid up his neck again over the handprint of warmth he'd left behind on Will's skin. Will's breath alternated between deep and shallow and his heart raced beneath Hannibal's fingertips.

"Don't stop." Will put his arms around Hannibal's neck again and pressed himself against Hannibal's immobile frame, a hand on the back of his head, slipping his fingers through Hannibal's hair. Will felt Hannibal's body respond, soften, his defenses and his objections melting away.

Hannibal lifted Will's chin with the corner of one finger and kissed him with deliberate gentleness, then warmth, then passion. Breaking free at last, they shared breath, foreheads together, before Hannibal reached up and brushed Will's hair from his brow with one hand and slid his other down between his legs. Will made a soft, appreciative sound, closing his eyes, pulling the rest of Hannibal's buttons free, a couple of them tearing from their threads and flying away to parts unknown.

"Look at me," Hannibal said. It was a request, not an order, but Will did so as Hannibal brushed his hair back again. "Your beauty… is arresting. I find that it constantly distracts me. I am not used to such a lack of focus."

Will half smiled, traced his fingers through a silver streak in Hannibal's hair. "You're in my head. You're everywhere." His hand wandered back to the space between Hannibal's shoulder blades, and he pulled Hannibal close again. *And despite it all, I will miss you when you're gone.*

Hannibal eased him back onto the bed and freed him of his last article of clothing before shrugging off the jacket and ruined shirt. He put his mouth on Will's neck again, then on his lips, caressing him in a way that brought the desired response. After this short preview, he pushed his trousers down further to free himself and gathered them both in his hand, trapped between their bodies as they lay together. Will's fingers dug into Hannibal's back as Hannibal used his free hand to cup the back of Will's neck, just at his hairline, a possessive grip.

He eased up after a few moments and snagged the hair on the lower base of Will's head, pulling it gently, then with more force to lift Will's head from his shoulder. Looking him directly in the eyes, Hannibal's body seized with his finish, the sudden warmth added to his hand on Will making his climax follow only a few moments after. His body went limp, and he crumpled, trusting Hannibal to catch him, which he did, easing them both the last few inches down onto the old mattresses.

"I wanted to bring you a measure of comfort. Relief. What you asked for. Something besides pain."

"You did. You are." Will slid into his arms again, resting his head on the place just below Hannibal's collarbone. Hannibal apparently couldn't stop himself from inhaling the scent of

his hair, and smoothing it with his fingertips, emitting a contented sigh that struck Will in the heart.

After a long silence, Will asked, “Why *did* you come here tonight? Because you heard Chilton was going to test me?”

Hannibal didn’t answer immediately.

Will shifted against him. “Maybe that was it. And the rest was unplanned. But you wanted to know what I’d told him.”

“Don’t presume,” Hannibal warned, though his voice was tender.

“Then *enlighten* me.”

“You bring me immense pleasure, Will. You always have,” Hannibal said after a time. “That pleasure came from physical sources. But I find that bringing you solace gives me a sense of satisfaction. And purpose.” He ran his fingers through Will’s hair again. “You awaken me, Will.”

Will sat up and looked at him. “What does that mean?” he inquired cautiously.

Hannibal leaned up and kissed his mouth, then his forehead with blessed reverence. “I don’t know,” he answered.

….and CUT!

Now, start the episode again. It’s the next morning. Hannibal comes to see Will for their appointment, but Chilton intercepts him. He tells Hannibal that Will remembers all of the shady therapy techniques that Hannibal used, and that Will is now under his exclusive care. Go home, Hannibal, there’s no meeting for you! Later in the episode, more of Will’s memories emerge, and he realizes that Abel Gideon was with him at Hannibal’s house the night Will mistook him for Garret Jacob Hobbs. Abel could snitch on Hannibal if Will plays his cards right. Chilton is convinced to transfer Abel back home to roost…

…stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 5: Mukōzuke

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has arranged for another clandestine meeting, but he wasn't expecting Will to derail the situation, leaving no time for talking.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “You And Whose Army?” – Radiohead

“Come on, come on
You think you drive me crazy
Come on, come on
You and whose army?
You and your cronies
Come on, come on
Holy Roman empire
Come on if you think
Come on if you think
You can take us on
You can take us on
You and whose army?
You and your cronies
You forget so easily
We ride tonight
We ride tonight
Ghost horses
Ghost horses”

Chilton inadvertently helps Will regain memories of Hannibal inducing seizures and helping his encephalitis along. After, Chilton confronts Hannibal with the discovery of his “unorthodox methods" and is basically like, “I’m Will’s only doctor now, and apparently I’m not the only one who can be accused of driving a patient to kill!” He seems pretty happy about that and says “we need to stick together.” Later, Will uncovers another memory – that Abel Gideon was at Hannibal’s house the night Will had his “mild seizure.” He convinces Chilton to bring Abel back to the Baltimore State Hospital so he can try to get Abel to snitch on Hannibal. Hannibal catches Beverly snooping around his house and kills her, leaving her to be found in the old observatory. Will is brought to the crime scene to interpret the evidence, which in his mind again points to Hannibal. Chilton meets with Will and asks him what he and Beverly talked about last

time they met. Will says, “You talked to Hannibal about my therapy, despite our agreement” to which Chilton says, “I gave him a preview of what was to come.” Will responds with “I have appearances to maintain.” He doesn’t want Hannibal to know that he was the one who cut off their doctor-patient relationship and would rather have Chilton be the buffer. Later, Will and Abel Gideon meet again and Will asks Abel to tell his story. Abel essentially says “Hard pass!” He doesn’t wanna get murdered too! This scene occurs that evening after Will and Abel have their little cage-room chit-chat.

Abel Gideon snored. He snored like he was not only sawing logs, but pulverizing them into pulp to be made into paper, then mashing up and recycling said paper.

Will didn’t care. He didn’t want to sleep. Sleep meant dreaming, and dreaming meant Beverly.

Even now, awake – allegedly, he thought darkly – he could see her standing in the hall just beyond the bars, a raven-haired specter, so detailed he could see the dim light of the fluorescents glinting off of her maroon leather jacket. That jacket, her favorite one – she wore it constantly. It was ruined now, sliced up into sections, though the Chesapeake Ripper had left it half-intact on the largest portion of her, a fitting burial shroud.

“Not the Chesapeake Ripper,” Will whispered into his knees as he hid his face from Beverly’s phantom. He was curled up on his bunk, sitting like a little kid with his legs up, resting his head, arms wrapped around his shins. “You know his name.”

It was still agonizing, even though he knew the truth. His core, the visceral part of him that craved the connection with Hannibal, willing to possess it at whatever the cost, hesitated to replace the killer’s moniker with the given name of the man who committed the crimes.

In his mind’s eye, he saw Beverly step up to the bars, curling her fingers around them. “Will,” she said, her voice gentle. “Interpret the evidence.” Behind her, the shadow of the stag loomed large, menacing. Instead of letting it intimidate her, she turned and cradled its head in her hands. Like a maiden taming a unicorn in an old story, they settled onto the floor together, the stag resting its head carefully in her lap, its deadly antlers shrinking to accommodate the position until they nearly disappeared. Beverly ran her hands along the creature’s ebony feather-fur, stroking its neck with a sad smile.

Will’s eyes widened as Bev slid back into her seat after changing into the tank top with purple sequins she’d brought with her. They caught the light, rippling as she moved, darkly iridescent, like the stag’s feather-fur. The lights in the club lowered, and the music shifted to something with a pulsing heartbeat accompanied by slightly off-key electronic voices, both high and pleading and lowly threatening.

“What? I had it in my purse,” Beverly explained, drawing her hair into a high ponytail. Colored lights washed the empty dance floor. “C’mon, this is a good song.”

“You go right ahead. I’ll be here.”

“You suck, Will. Get up, let’s go.” She tugged at his arm.

“No,” he said. Then, softly, “I shouldn’t be saying no. I should have danced to every single song with you.”

“Miss?” Beverly signaled the waitress. “Please get this man another margarita so he can get the stick out of his ass.”

“Will do!” the waitress called over her shoulder as she returned to the bar with a tray of empties.

“I didn’t know what you’d think of me.” Will exhaled slowly, feeling the lost opportunity of these moments. “If I’d told you the truth, you’d know that I hadn’t danced with a girl since eighth grade formal.”

“Okay, fine,” Beverly cut in. “If you won’t dance, let’s play a game. Marry, fuck, kill. People we work with.”

“He chose you for kill,” Will whispered, body stock-still but his insides twisted with the agony of his knowledge. The table between them now was a crystal plate, a slice of Beverly trapped beneath glass.

Beverly leaned her elbows on the display of herself and sipped her drink. “Kill… Crawford. Just because he’s so damn stubborn. And I don’t like how hard he pushes you sometimes.” Will’s heart flickered with warmth. “Fuck — oh, that’s easy. Have you seen Ignacio from HR?”

Will shook his head no.

“Smokin’ hot,” Beverly insisted. “He’s bald but it looks sooooo good on him. Great big brown eyes. You should make up some reason to get an appointment with him just to check him out.”

“I wonder if he knows you’re dead,” Will said darkly, but Beverly breezed right by his comment.

“And marry…” Bev took a drink as she thought. “Who’s that psychiatrist with the long brown hair? I’m shit with names. Flower something…?”

“Alana Bloom,” he said quickly, then winced. That had sounded over-eager.

“Right, Dr. Bloom.” If Beverly noticed him brightening at the name she made no indication. “Totally marry her.” She polished off another margarita and punctuated it with a little burp. “She’s cute and she doesn’t seem crazy. And I bet she cooks. Like I’d come home from a long day at the lab and she’d have a pot roast or a meatloaf ready.”

“Alana’s the perfect choice. I wish the two of you would’ve quit, and left together. Left me.” Will felt a tear leave his left eye and slide along the scratchy plane of his cheek.

“Are you gonna drink that or fondle it?”

Will realized he was tracing his fingers around the base of the sweating margarita glass. He leaned in and put his mouth on the straw and pretended to drink.

“Okay. Your turn. Marry, fuck, kill, Behavioral Science edition, let’s go. You play this game or you dance, Special Agent Graham,” Beverly threatened him, emphasizing her point by throwing a broken chip at him. It bounced off of his chest.

“Marry…” He swallowed, throat suddenly full of sick antipathy and thick regret. “Hannibal Lecter.”

Beverly played with the straw in her cup. “You wanted to build a home with him.”

“Fuck him.”

“Done and done.” Beverly gave him a sad half-smile over the slice of herself that stretched between them. “And kill?”

“Hannibal Lecter.”

Beverly nodded. They sat in heartbroken silence for a long time as the club came to life around them.

Finally, Beverly shook it off and smiled. “Are you gonna drink that thing or what?”

“You want it?” He slid the drink towards her.

“No! I’m trying to get you to loosen up and live a little!”

Will stood up and came around to her chair. “Y-you… you were a good friend, Bev. One of the best, a-and-and I’m so-so sorry. This is all my fault.”

“Hey, cut it out.” She got to her feet and took his hand. “I’m a big girl, okay? I made my own decisions. When Jack wasn’t there, I went looking anyway.” She sighed, then seemed to shake off her sadness. “C’mon. Let’s dance.”

He let her lead him to the dance floor, to the womb-like crush of anonymous bodies. Will embraced her with possessive arms and hands, as if he could keep her like this, close and safe, if he just held on tightly enough.

The crowd parted as the stag stalked toward them. It stopped just short of where they danced, and the floor cleared, the other dancers shrinking back in terror. The music stopped and the multicolored lights all went red, staining them with blood made of photons instead of iron and wine.

“I’m going to kill him, Bev. Abel Gideon… he’s right. He won’t be caught. If I want him, I will have to kill him.”

She kissed him goodbye. “Fair enough.”

Will's head shot up from his knees and he emitted an audible gasp that echoed through the dark, spider-filled corners of his cell. Abel Gideon's snoring stumbled for a few moments as if he stirred in his sleep, but then fell back into its monotony. Will, breathing hard, got up from the bed to splash water on his face, trying to rinse off the dream. He lay down on the floor of the cell and hooked his feet between the bars, cranking out an uncountable number of sit-ups, trying to drive away the tormented thoughts that migrated from one side of his brain to the other on black wings. When his abdominals burned, he flipped over and did push-ups until he couldn't anymore. Only in the rush of endorphins and sweet exhaustion could he find even a second of peace.

He climbed back onto his bed with a groan, muscles straining, hair slicked with sweat. He couldn't find it. Not even a minute where his entire soul wasn't boiling in a lake of guilt and regret and bitter, vengeful anger. He felt possessed by it, as if the antipathy and hate were some sort of otherworldly being that had pushed him aside and was inhabiting his body. He was a vessel, a flesh puppet, a stretch of land constantly colonized by something or someone else. When he wasn't conquered by his rage, he was occupied by a foreign force – Hannibal Lecter. Will Graham the individual cowered in the borderlands with no place of his own.

But hadn't it always been that way? His mind had always been engulfed in a turf war with whoever he empathized with. The killers he profiled traversed the no-man's-land between the trenches, gaining ground until, at last, they were forced back by Will's mental artillery. But each victory was not without casualties. And there was no army strong enough to stop Hannibal's invasion, its wake a scar on the landscape full of blood, barbed wire, and broken bodies.

Will's mind reeled back through the years of his life before he could stop it, dragging him all the way back to Biloxi. Aunt Louise had come to stay for a while. It was the summer she'd taken a brief interest in helping Beau Graham raise his son after Will's mother had left. She'd moved into their trailer and taken it over within a matter of days, evicting Will from his room and making it her own, leaving him to sleep in the living room with Bandit, which wasn't all bad. Will liked to wait until everyone was asleep and watch old black-and-white movies on the few fuzzy channels they could get with the rabbit ears, even the scary ones like *Carnival of Souls.*

Having Aunt Louise around had other benefits, like hot meals and a tidy kitchen. The drawbacks included daily scoldings, bad at-home haircuts, and church. So much church. Louise was devout, and preferred preachers who wove a tapestry of terror, threaded with the promise of imminent damnation. Having to sit through the services instead of playing outside was bad, but Will was good at daydreaming. He'd imagine himself back in the swamps, catching frogs or fireflies, or recall his first time playing with Bandit when the dog was only a puppy, and a runt at that. But this was not without risk. If Will didn't stand up with everyone else, bow his head appropriately at prayer time, or otherwise indicate a lack of engagement with the sermon, Aunt Louise wouldn't hesitate to pinch his ear or deliver a slap.

Once, he'd cried when she'd had him take communion. Little Will had thought that the grape Kool-Aid was real blood. That'd earned him a spanking, right there in the middle of the congregation.

All at once, he was the little boy in the pew, suffocating in the Bible verses and unairconditioned church packed with bodies and righteousness.

"C'mon, Billy, quit draggin' your feet." Aunt Louise hauled him up by the arm and shuffled him to the end of the row, hurrying into the aisle. Parishioners were lined up, waiting for the preacher to lay his healing hands on them.

"Oh Lord," Reverend White cried to the heavens as he placed his hand on a woman's forehead. "Take from your servant Miss Clementine all of the cancer, Lord, and replace those tumors with your love and light, Lord! Jesus, heal our sister Clementine, in your name, amen!" The old woman shuffled back to her seat and another ailing creature took her place as the choir sang. "Lord, we pray that you heal our brother Theodore, that you lift the pain from his herniated disc Lord. Good sweet Jesus who died for our sins, take the pain from brother Theodore, in your name Amen!"

Now it was their turn. Aunt Louise dragged him up the steps to Reverend White, who towered over Will, a mass of sweating man in a wilting suit, his stiff salt-and-pepper crew cut impervious to the heat. "Sister Louise, what ails you?"

"It's not me, Reverend, it's Billy here. He's under spiritual crisis. All he does is wander around in the woods, play with bugs – he talks to his dog and he hasn't made any friends. His teachers say he's whip-smart but he doesn't care about his grades."

Will felt his flesh searing from his bones as shame engulfed him. How could she? How could she just announce everything wrong with him in front of the entire church? He wrenched his arm out of her grip, but she snagged it again. "Let go!" he shouted. "I wanna go home!"

Reverend White put a thick, meaty hand on his shoulder and clamped down, raising his Bible to the sky with the other. "Lord, have mercy on this boy. Steer him to a good, Christian life away from sin–"

"Don't touch me!" Will dropped to the floor like a stone, which achieved the desired effect – both adults lost their grip on him. He rolled down the steps and sped for the door, only to be caught by a couple of older men and brought back to the chancel, limp and defeated.

"That boy's got the Devil in him," Reverend White said. "Lord, cast the Devil out of this child!"

Will stood there, unmoving, staring up into the Reverend's face, smoldering brimstone behind his eyes. If he had the Devil in him, he'd cast him out on his own terms. He didn't need some Bible-beater to do it for him.

Will felt that same brimstone now, that same rage and ache of exposure and betrayal.

You have him in you, as they say. He is the Devil, Mr. Graham. He is smoke.

Well, it was time to get him – Hannibal – out. Exorcised. And Will knew he had the Old Testament vengeance to do it, if he could play a long game. It didn't matter that he'd taken

Hannibal's unholy communion, consuming the blood and flesh of his victims. All he had to do was figure out a way to kill Hannibal and not destroy himself in the process.

"Mr. Graham."

He sat up, exhausted abdominal muscles shrieking at his sudden movement.

Ed and Sully. *Fuck* . Chilton had made it seem like Hannibal understood that he wasn't supposed to see Will. Not that he knew about their clandestine meet-ups. Will chastised himself. He should have known that Hannibal would ignore such a request, especially coming from someone he didn't have much respect for.

Will prepared himself mentally. It was time to go back on stage. He could never imagine himself playing a role in any kind of dramatic production. Hell, Will still got occasional stage fright from lecturing, and did better if he imagined the hall was empty. But this part he needed to play, well, it was the role of a lifetime. It didn't hurt that it was method acting. He could portray a version of himself that was still in love with Hannibal without any difficulty. All of the memories and the emotions were still there, just waiting for him to access. No, the struggle would be keeping his vengeful, brimstone fury at bay. He promised blood to the brimstone fury that lived in him, promised it revenge if it would just keep quiet for now.

I have appearances to maintain. The longer Hannibal thought they were friends, the more time Will had to craft his plans.

The pretext this time was a series of tests at the hospital. "Apparently, your cell counts or what-have-you didn't look so good last time they drew blood," Ed explained patiently. "We need to take you in and make sure that pesky brain disease isn't back. No need to get dressed. Put these on." He passed Will a pair of nondescript scrub pants that he pulled over his shorts. Soon, Ed and Sully moved Will through the building on Jolene, bite mask firmly fixed over his face.

Will didn't try to speak to them. Ed and Sully loaded him into a waiting transport truck, Sully behind the wheel and Ed in the back. Will kept his eyes on the floor as they drove through the dark, the days shorter now as the continent darkened for winter.

The ride was only about a half an hour. Sully pulled over and came to let Ed out. They unlocked Will's shackles, leaving him only in the straight jacket and bite mask. Will peeked out over their shoulders through the open door. They were in some kind of desolate industrial park, lined with warehouses, dimly lit and remote.

Well, maybe tonight's the night, Will thought without much enthusiasm one way or another. *Mess with the Chesapeake Ripper and you get got.*

"Have a nice time," Sully said as he and Ed hopped down from the back of the transport, leaving the doors open. They walked around the front of the vehicle and, Will assumed, away, their footsteps disappearing into the sounds of the semi-urban night – distant clattering trains and the drone of a nearby interstate. The winter-pierced air was cool and delicious against what little of his skin was exposed, the smell tinged with industrial exhaust but still fresh and vibrant.

“Good evening, Will.”

Will sat up straighter on the bench seat as Hannibal stepped into the back of the transport, shutting one door behind, leaving the other cracked open a few inches. He wore his dark wool overcoat and a pair of leather gloves – all these, of course, over the immaculate suit, this one brown-gray with harvest colors in the shirt and tie. The only things out of place were a few strands of hair disheveled by the night wind. Hannibal didn’t move them back into place – he was too busy studying Will with a sharp, discerning gaze.

He thinks he knows what to expect. Will’s inner monologue might sound like Hannibal, but the smugness behind the words was his own. *He’s wrong.*

“Hannibal,” he said behind the mask, with gentle gratitude. It came out muffled, of course, but Hannibal tilted his head at the sound of his name uttered in a voice that was anything but enraged or even bitter. Still moving warily, Hannibal removed his coat and gloves, folding everything neatly on the bench, then sat across from Will, their knees almost touching. He hesitated. Will tried to emote through the mask, using his eyes to beg.

It worked. Hannibal leaned close, washing Will with his scent, and unbuckled the mask. He carefully slid it free from Will’s head and sat back, abandoning it on the bench seat next to him. “Dr. Chilton all but threatened–”

Will had to play this just right, to seem impatient without coming off as a threat. He stood from his seat and leaned into Hannibal, planting a knee on either side of his hips to kneel in his lap. Will consciously surrendered, his mind and body waving a white flag, inviting Hannibal’s invasion and pushing back the rage. *This is part of my trap, Bev. It’s not a violation of your memory.*

Will kissed him, moving in hard, pushing his tongue out immediately. Hannibal kept his lips shut for a moment. But then they opened, as did the teeth, and Will was granted entrance. Still, Hannibal was slow in responding, eventually pulling back. Will had no way to stop him – his arms were buckled down in the straitjacket, fastened across his chest. “Will–”

Will wasn’t about to let him get a word in. He tensed his thighs, simultaneously trapping Hannibal where he sat and pushing himself up to reach Hannibal’s mouth again. Hannibal tried to angle his mouth away; Will compensated by working his lips down Hannibal’s throat until he was stopped by the collar and tie. He could feel Hannibal’s resistance cracking away, just like it always did, without fail, all his stiffness melting, except in one place.

When Will moved his attention back up, around the corner of Hannibal’s jaw and back to his mouth, he found it hot and waiting for his tongue again, wet and anxious. At last, Hannibal put his hands on Will, one arm sliding around his hip to cup his backside, the other finding its way into his hair, as it always did. Will strained against the straitjacket, emitting a growl of frustration that brought an amused glint to Hannibal’s eyes. He yanked Will’s head to the side none too gently to kiss his throat in return, visiting his favorite places.

He’s thought about eating me. He’s thinking about it right now.

Will forced the intruding knowledge aside like flinging a glass from a table with the back of his hand.

“Will-”

He clamped down on Hannibal’s lower lip with his teeth, not hard enough to draw blood, but enough to telegraph his meaning. Releasing slowly, he noted Hannibal’s increased fervor after the near-violence, the hand on his ass squeezing tighter, the fingers in his hair caressing down the back of his neck in a claw of possession. Now along Will’s thighs, gripping them, feeling the muscle beneath, testing their strength. And now one hand between them, feeling Will through the scrubs, gauging his response, which was aching, already swollen with desire.

“Will, I have–”

“No.” Will growled the word, a low, visceral mutter. “No talking.”

The request was crafted twofold – to telegraph his hunger to Hannibal, and to prevent any conversation. Talking meant manipulation. Talking made room for mistakes.

Will pulled back, sliding off of Hannibal and onto the bench next to him. They were both breathing heavily. “Stand up,” Will ordered, shifting uncomfortably in the straitjacket, sweat prickling his brow.

“Do you want me to free you?”

“I don’t need my hands for what I’m going to do to you.”

Hannibal’s eyes were dark, his proud mouth softened by Will’s persistence. “Very well.”

Will got on his knees. He nosed along Hannibal’s inner thigh, then up against him, drawing his face over the fine fabric of the suit trousers, inhaling Hannibal’s intimate scent, a potent pheromone. It took him several tries, but he was able to grip the edge of the fly with his teeth and unhook it from the metal clasp within. Hannibal watched him with amorous anticipation and no lack of amusement. Will took the fabric in his teeth and pulled so hard the inner button snapped free. Hannibal made a soft sound of encouragement as he got the end of the zipper between his teeth and eased it down.

Getting everything down was taking too long, so Will acquiesced and let Hannibal help, encouraging him also to unbutton his vest and shirt and push them aside, giving him an unobstructed view of what Will intended to do.

Will looked up at him, straining briefly against the straitjacket again, not because he wanted to be let out, but because he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Hannibal liked to watch him struggle.

Will started slowly, took his time. This, too, was by design. Tongue on the left thigh, right, above. Breathing on him only, nuzzling gently until Hannibal seemed painfully erect and Will could detect the simple changes in his breathing, and the slightest shift in his scent.

“I can’t bring myself to fault your methods, but we have limited–” Hannibal began, but let the last words go as Will finally opened his mouth and made good on his promises. Hannibal tilted his head back, his hands finding Will’s hair as if by instinct, stroking, a few gentle tugs. Will pulled him in deep and released slowly, undulating his tongue along the bottom length, something Hannibal had once done to him, so he knew how good it felt.

“You’re better each time,” Hannibal sighed.

I should bite it off. He wants me to eat human flesh? I’ll fucking eat it.

Will swallowed back his thoughts, among other things.

He could feel the change in the way Hannibal felt in his mouth, and released him immediately before he could finish.

“You are — skilled,” Hannibal admitted reverently, “but cruel.”

Will cocked his head and smiled. Hannibal guided him to his feet by a hand under his chin, lingering on his throat. “Help me,” Will demanded, and Hannibal seemed happy to assist, stripping off his pants.

“Do you want me to prepare you?”

“Hurry it up,” Will urged as Hannibal hustled out of his jacket and pulled the small bottle out of his pocket. The sight of it gave Will a sense of satisfaction. Hannibal had come here with an agenda, probably to manipulate him, perhaps try to deny what he did to Beverly. All of that, followed by an artful seduction where he would rely on Will to come to him like a wounded bird looking for shelter from the storm. Will had detailed all of it, and it fueled his arousal.

“Lay down,” Will directed him. “I have a few more tricks.”

“Interesting choice of words.” He expected Hannibal to resist, to assert dominance, but he took Will’s suggestion, putting an arm behind his head and reclining on the built in metal bench seat. Will came to the edge and put his mouth on Hannibal for a few more tantalizing moments, then climbed on top, attempting to find his balance with his arms secured in the straitjacket. Hannibal gazed up at him dreamily and took Will by the hips.

Will positioned himself, then lowered down, Hannibal using one hand to guide himself in. Will exhaled sharply as Hannibal slid in, and tossed his head back. Hannibal sighed gratefully, fixing his hands on Will’s hips and working with him as he moved. Will wasn’t planning on it, barely noticed it was happening until it was too late. Hannibal was driving into him at just the right angle, apparently, and he climaxed without warning. It spread through his body like fire traveling over a pool of gasoline, consuming everything in its path. He was aware, in the afterglow, that Hannibal was holding him up by the ribs. He opened his eyes to see Hannibal’s expression, so pleased with himself he was fairly glowing.

“My legs are about to give out,” Will admitted breathlessly, still quivering all over in the aftershocks.

Hannibal's response was to pull out and get behind him in a quick movement, bend him over and enter again, roughly, finding his own rhythm now as if discovering it for the first time. One hand clung to the back buckle of the straitjacket, the other stretched up to snag his hair again, forcing his face down on the metal seat. Will curved it to the side so he could breathe, inhaling sharply every so often as Hannibal pushed in further, harder, faster.

At last he paused, pulling back on Will's hair and planting his other palm over his heart, angling him backward, twisting their faces to meet one another. The hand on Will's chest slid up over his throat to his chin and Hannibal brought their lips together with crushing force. Will winced, tried to keep his mouth closed, but Hannibal's hand tightened on his chin. Will parted his jaw and let the probing tongue inside for a few careless moments. Blood in his mouth.

Hannibal disengaged from his lips, but kept the closeness. "You deserve a reward," he whispered.

"You mean, another one?" Will smirked through his pain and exhaustion, still weak from pleasure. His entire body was slick with sweat and other fluids, though Hannibal's touch was still cool and dry on his flushed skin.

"As many as you can endure." Hannibal pushed him down again. Will exhaled, then breathed in sharply as Hannibal slid a finger in, then two. The tempest of the climax came unexpectedly again — he'd never had two in a row that close together before.

"And what do you say?" Hannibal purred in his ear as he gasped for breath against the cool, slick metal of the bench.

"Thank you," he recited as Hannibal turned him on his back again, spread his legs and entered, easily enough this time. Thinking better of it after a minute or two, he sat and pulled Will into his lap so they were face to face. He held Will by the straps of the straitjacket and thrust up into him.

You have him in you , as they say .

Hannibal bent his head into Will's throat as Will arched his back and squeezed his eyes shut. Hannibal held him tightly, laboring to breathe in his own right. Will's breath was shallow, little gulps of air punctuated with silent winces of pain he was desperate to conceal.

At last, Hannibal gripped his bound torso with the immense force of his release. This dissolved into a tender embrace as Hannibal supported Will on his lap, arms wrapped around him, trying to be gentle without having access to Will's skin beneath the bindings. After their breathing settled, Hannibal lifted Will's head from where it had been resting on his shoulder, cupping it between his palms. He brushed his thumb under Will's eye and traced it along his cheek as the preamble to a kiss.

Hannibal broke it to check his watch. Will was delighted at the little huff of displeasure. Wordlessly, Hannibal helped Will stand and pulled up his clothing, arranging it as neatly as possible before re-dressing himself. Will sat on the transport bench and watched him with naked hunger, and Hannibal moved deliberately under that gaze, giving Will the best view

possible. After trapping himself back in his suit, Hannibal in turn put Will back into his shackles.

“Your impatience is intoxicating,” Hannibal admitted to him as he toyed with the bite mask, looking at it instead of Will’s actual face. “There are things we should have discussed tonight.”

“Next time, I guess.” Will smiled at him, demure and sweet with a wolf beneath.

Hannibal leaned in, taking his time despite their lack of it, applying a firm kiss that was both sensual and possessive.

There won’t be a next time. Because I’m going to kill you.

The puzzle pieces of a plan fell into place as Hannibal grazed his teeth over Will’s lower lip and released him. The bailiff’s killer. Freddie Lounds. It could work.

“Goodnight, Will.”

Will gave him his prettiest smile. “Goodnight.”

One final kiss. Will let himself relish it. Because if he had his way, this would be the last one.

Hannibal slipped the muzzle over his head, smoothed Will’s hair, and left.

...and CUT!

In the next scene, Hannibal invites Chilton for drinks at his office. They agree it’s best that they keep each other's secrets regarding unorthodox therapy methods. Will continues to move chess pieces, namely Abel Gideon and Matthew Brown.

... stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 6: Futamono

Chapter Summary

Will sent Matthew Brown to kill Hannibal, but his proxy failed. Hannibal is more fixated on Will's relationship with his dead "friend" and how Will might have enticed Matthew to kill for him.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Eyes on Fire” – Blue Foundation

“I'll seek you out
Flay you alive
One more word and you won't survive
And I'm not scared
Of your stolen power
I see right through you any hour
I won't soothe your pain
I won't ease your strain
You'll be waiting in vain
I got nothing for you to gain
I'm taking it slow
Feeding my flame
Shuffling the cards of your game
And just in time
In the right place
Suddenly, I will play my ace…
Eyes on fire
Your spine is ablaze
Felling any foe with my gaze
And just in time
In the right place
Steadily emerging with grace”

Well, the cat’s out of the bag. Will tried to kill Hannibal by sending Matthew Brown after him. However, a tip from Abel Gideon leads Alana and Jack to search for Hannibal. They find him and save him at the last moment. At the beginning of Episode 6, Hannibal is composing a piece of music that is going to help him “digest” what happened. Later, he has Alana over to help him assemble some shish kebabs… made of hearts. This scene happens in the wee hours of the morning after that evening’s dinner date.

“Wake up, Mr. Graham.”

Will opened his eyes and sat up on his lumpy bunk. He hadn’t been asleep. He hadn’t slept since he’d asked Matthew Brown to kill Hannibal. His mind wouldn’t rest, a fire blazing within fuelled by contradictory thoughts and wild emotions. For the first time since the encephalitis, he felt genuinely crazy, completely out of touch, on the brink of violence.

“I’m not going,” he said, ignoring the white-coated orderlies at his door.

“Please don’t make a scene.”

“Why not?” Will got out of bed and stood to challenge them. His voice was hoarse and his eyes felt hot, gritty.

Sully responded by flicking open his baton.

“I’d love for you to try.” He could almost smell the blood he’d spill from these two pieces of shit before they beat him senseless.

Ed put his fingers on Sully’s wrist, the one attached to the hand with the baton, a halting gesture. “He won’t like that,” he murmured, too softly for the microphones to hear.

“Yeah, well, if we don’t deliver, we don’t get paid,” Sully hissed back. “And I got child support payments.”

“You’ve *spawned* ?” Will sneered, lip curling in disgust. “Was she your first or second cousin?”

“Shut the fuck up–”

Again, Ed put a calming hand on the smaller man, soothing his dog. He withdrew a notepad from his breast pocket and wrote a message, then held up the notebook clandestinely for Will to see.

Cooperate. Or we will beat the old man in cell 3 within an inch of his life.

Hannibal must have told them that Will had little regard for his own wellbeing, but would cave if threatened with someone else’s pain. It was a very *Hannibal fucking Lecter* thing to do.

“Bold of you to assume I give a shit,” Will tried, crossing his arms in what he hoped was a cavalier posture.

Ed called his bluff, gesturing with the note again.

He was acquiring quite the body count. Beverly Katz. Matthew Brown. *Nobody else is gonna die because of me. Except Hannibal.*

The old man was right. Demons walked the halls of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, and they could look like people. They could look like anyone.

“Don’t bother getting dressed, Mr. Graham.” Ed pulled out the cuffs.

Will stared at them with venomous eyes. He could fight. Maybe it was time Chilton knew. Maybe it was time everybody knew. Who cared if they thought his accusations of Hannibal were all some lovers’ quarrel? It certainly wasn’t legal for Hannibal to be sneaking in here, especially considering what they seemed to end up doing every time.

He thought of the old timer. Pictured his yellowed nails and his missing teeth, the callous indignity of his keeping at this age. He was a killer, yes, but he was also a sick old man with no grasp of reality. Maybe he’d never had one. Will eyed Sully’s baton and imagined it slamming into the old man’s spotted lips, falling across the back of his crepe-paper neck, the violence bubbling to the surface of his mind in perfect detail, as it always did.

Will exhaled, briefly closed his eyes, then backed up to the door, letting Ed cuff him.

As they traversed the cellblock steeped in early-morning quiet, Will snuck a glance at the demon slayer. The old man was kneeling, despite his age and the obvious pain in his bones, frail body folded in the supplication of prayer, elbows and clasped hands on the bed. Like a child, begging the Lord to take his soul, should he fail to wake. That, Will thought, would be a mercy.

It was, of course, back to the elevator. Will clamped down on his urge to fight Hannibal’s messengers, wrapping the loathing in an unwavering grip.

Hannibal was wearing a new suit, something Will hadn’t seen before, accented with rich blue and hints of bronze in the paisley tie. It infuriated him, thinking of Hannibal out and about, getting measured for shirts, picking out socks, testing different fabrics with his fingers. Vaguely, he wondered what Beverly’s brothers had picked for her to wear in her casket. But then, Will remembered that not only was Beverly likely to be cremated given the state of her body, her remains would be evidence for a long, long time. Unless the case was solved. Only then would her family have her back. Yet another reason to get Hannibal to make a mistake.

Will stepped off the elevator, arms cuffed tightly behind his back, and stood in sullen regard of his adversary. Hannibal was seated in one of the old armchairs, a sketchbook balanced on his knee. Pencil in hand, he appeared to be putting the finishing touches on an intricate drawing.

Hannibal. He wasn’t supposed to ever see Hannibal again. The last time was supposed to be the last time. Anger and fear and a strange, cloying bittersweetness combined within him, a potent brew of… something. Hannibal Lecter should have been dead and buried by now, not sitting in this chair, not living, breathing, that tongue sneaking out to touch that bottom lip, that heart pumping blood to those warm, adept hands. Eyes that were supposed to be flat and dull, vessels broken from asphyxiation were bright and sharp, wounded and dangerous. And that goddamn scent, his smell, invading Will’s space, flowing into his lungs.

The last time was supposed to be the last time.

Hannibal turned the sketchpad toward Will so he could see the drawing. “I made a few modifications,” he said, voice bland, revealing nothing.

It was still Will in profile, but the flowers surrounding him were not the hibiscus and birds of paradise he’d drawn at the conservatory. The foliage depicted belladonna, oleander, and ragwort, the petals beautiful but their shapes and shading somehow menacing.

“Pretty poison,” Will said, his jaw tight, mouth drawn flat against itself. He clasped his wrist where it was secured and dug the edge of the handcuff into his skin, just to have somewhere to direct the destruction he wanted to wreak, until he found another opportunity to let slip his dogs of war.

“It seemed more appropriate. Would you like it? To cheer up your cell, perhaps.”

Will stared at him in glacial silence.

Hannibal pulled up his briefcase and rested it on his legs. Flipping it open, he placed the sketchbook within, and brought out a container with some kind of meat in it, along with a few grilled tomatoes. Hannibal opened the lid, and for a moment Will enjoyed the smell, the warm, rich, savory essence of meat that wasn’t prepared in the prison kitchen.

He’s eating them.

Will’s stomach turned and he parted his lips, trying to breathe through his mouth.

“I’ve been metabolizing my near-death experience in as many constructive ways as I can,” Hannibal told him, tipping up the lid of the container to better show Will what was inside. The grilled meat and tomatoes rested on metal skewers, dusted with herbs and cooked, most likely, to perfection. “Composing music. My art. Cooking, of course. I thought you might like to try some of this.”

Will took an unconscious step back. Hannibal kept his same expression, one of mild offering.

“Shish kebabs, made with heart, sweet onion, and tomato. Seasoned with Genovese basil, dusted with sea salt. Won’t be as good as fresh, but it has to be better than what they’re feeding you here.”

“Whose heart is it?” Will asked, words strained, jaw still locked against his nausea. “Beverly’s? No, can’t be hers. You took her kidneys.” He managed a little breath and tried to keep his voice from shaking. “Is it Abigail’s?”

“Would knowing where the meat came from help you decide if you’ll try it?”

Will barked out a laugh that was twisted with a deep fury.

Hannibal put the lid on the container and replaced it in his briefcase before clicking it shut. A fleeting look in his eyes brought a seeping understanding into Will’s consciousness.

It probably was a human heart; whose, Will didn't know. But what he did understand was the symbolism. It might as well have been Hannibal's heart, skewered on a thin metal needle, surrounded by a fruit that Europeans in the late 1700s called "poison apples." The French, however, named them *pomme d'amour.* Love apples. Poisoned love. Either way, they were pierced and roasted, meant to be consumed and destroyed along with the heart.

He'd hurt Hannibal. And Hannibal wanted him to know it. It was the same message conveyed when Hannibal reached up to brush back a lock of his own hair, giving Will a very deliberate view of his stitched up wrist.

That scar threw Will for a moment, the sight of it suddenly evoking regret, and a wish to do something ridiculous, like bandage it for him, bring him the pain medication, apply the salve. Once that had burned away, he felt pride. Hannibal was not a monolith. He was not a mythical monster, not smoke, not the Devil. He was mortal, and he could be hurt, hunted, trapped, and killed.

And, strangely enough, he sensed that pride mirrored in Hannibal's eyes. Like he was proud of Will for having discovered it, though perhaps he found the methods distasteful.

"Are you sure you won't try it? You've always been an adventurous eater, Will. Putting new things in your mouth."

"Likewise," Will said flatly, trying in vain not to imagine Hannibal's tongue in all of his most forbidden areas.

"Alana Bloom helped me assemble them. I invited her for dinner. She enjoyed them immensely. Went back for seconds, not something she often does. Petite thing."

Cold fury snaked around Will's guts at the thought of Alana eating a human heart without knowing it, savoring it, going back for more. "Leave her alone," he said before he could stop himself. Because that's what Hannibal wanted him to do – beg for mercy.

"How can I do that when we've grown so close?" A faint smile crossed Hannibal's face as he slid one knee over the other. "We're both in mourning for you, Will. Each of us has suffered a loss. It's only natural that we may find solace in one another."

"Leave her out of this. This is between you and me. If you wanna kill me, just do it now and get it over with. But I promise you, you won't walk out of here without a few new scars."

Hannibal sighed, as if the concept bored him. "Well, it would at least be face-to-face. Far more personal than sending a proxy."

Will pulled on his cuffs, letting the metal bite his skin again, just to ground him, hold him steady. Hannibal was more upset that Will hadn't planned to kill him himself than he was bothered by the attempt on his life. The twisted logic was making his mind dissolve into TV static.

"I have to admire your efforts, despite what they almost cost me." Hannibal's finger lingered against the cuff of his shirt for a moment before straightening it, as if he'd stopped himself

from touching the still-healing skin beneath. “For the first time, perhaps in your life, you’ve taken control. You’ve begun to utilize all of the cleverness at your disposal. You’re not afraid to make another devil’s bargain, this time with Freddie Lounds. What did she ask for in return, Will? To write a book about you, since she can’t have Abigail?”

A slow, nasty smile spread across Will’s face. “You thought it was about you,” he said. “Her article. You thought that-that I thought… *you* killed the bailiff to try and exonerate me. And then you killed the judge to *one-up* Matthew Brown. Show me how it’s done *properly* .”

Hannibal’s face didn’t physically change, but a wave of cold swept from him that Will could feel in the place in his mind where the ambient pulse lived. Will was right, and Hannibal was furious that he’d made the inference. Furious and hurt.

Instead of addressing Will’s statement, Hannibal crossed his legs on the other side and leaned his elbow on the arm of the chair in a posture of nonchalance. As if Will couldn’t see the quiver of the muscle on the side of his face, its flex a betrayal. “Speaking of adventurous eating,” he said, tone pleasant, conversational, in spite of what Will knew wrapped around his heart. “What did you offer Matthew Brown in return for killing me? I’m curious, Will – what did you promise him? And what did you deliver, perhaps?”

“I never promised him anything.” Will countered the strike with a blunt, inelegant defense.

“But you must have.” Hannibal made a steeple out of his hands, resting them back against his tie. “He said the two of you were friends. He cared for you enough to call me a Judas.”

“You are,” Will said flatly.

“I found that interesting,” Hannibal went on, breezing by Will’s comment as if he hadn’t heard, “considering he arranged me in a crucifixion pose, even created his own version of the stigmata. His design lacked a solid vision, don’t you think? Was I meant to be Judas, or Christ, crucified for you, Will, to save you from sin? A sacrifice to save *yourself* . Would you have been lifted up in that moment in your righteousness, or forever stained with blood, like Pontius Pilate?”

“Nice work getting him killed.” Will tossed his head back to get his hair out of his eyes. “It really would have, ah, *ruined* things to have him telling Jack all about you.”

“Or about you.” Hannibal stood now, stepping closer to Will. He could feel Hannibal’s injuries, both physical and emotional, the slashed wrists and the skewer through the heart, as if each wound appeared on his own body, a holy miracle reserved for the very devout, clerics crazy in their own right. “Tell me, Will – how did you get Matthew Brown to kill for you?”

Will shrugged, defiant. “Wind him up and watch him go.”

“You must have offered something.” Hannibal came closer still, and Will noted with triumph the glimmer of perspiration that gathered just beneath the part in his hair. “Did you promise him understanding? The kind of companionship two killers might share? Did you offer him flattery, tell him he was special, that you could understand him like no one else?”

“Isn’t that what you offered me?”

For a second, Will thought Hannibal was going to attack him, the way rage flickered from one side of his face to the other before disappearing beneath the mask again.

“If I manipulated Matthew Brown,” Will said slowly, letting every word come out of him like an arrow aimed at Hannibal’s heart. “I, ah, just used what I learned from *you* . I was trained by one of the best, wasn’t I?”

“It’s unnerving to hear ugly things come from such a pretty mouth.” Hannibal’s voice was low, just a few clicks above a whisper, mild as a spring afternoon, despite the anger Will felt against him like heat radiating from his skin. “I’ve always thought it one of your best features. I suppose it pleased Matthew Brown as well.”

“ *I never touched him,* ” Will snarled, stepping forward. They were inches apart now, two immovable forces in danger of collision.

“He only made himself known to you in the last few weeks,” Hannibal said, low, dangerous. “And within that time you convinced him to kill for you. I can’t imagine that happened without you spreading your legs.”

“I told you, I never touched him,” Will repeated, his breaths coming more rapidly now. Why was it *this* that managed to push him over the edge from calculated, methodical vengeance to fierce fire? “I’m not like you. I don’t just fuck people to fuck *with* them.”

“I told you many times, Will, that we shouldn’t-”

“Oh, bullshit. That was part of the act!”

Hannibal glared at him. “It wasn’t,” he denied.

Will slid closer, their faces now inches apart. “ *I never touched Matthew Brown,* ” he said slowly, with deep emphasis on every word, Hannibal’s scent rolling over him and filling the space between them. “And I never promised him I would.”

Hannibal’s eyes softened as he stared into Will’s. “You’re telling the truth.” His voice had lost its riotous edge, the words defanged.

“Yeah?” Will took a steadying breath, trying not to think about the warmth coming from Hannibal’s body, or how Hannibal’s face was so close that Will could feel his air against his lips.

“Matthew Brown was clumsy in many respects,” Hannibal said, coming another inch closer. “But he taught me a new trick. How to read eyes to see if a person is lying.”

Will’s heart shivered, his pulse bucking against the inside of his veins.

“How hard was it for you to say it?” Hannibal reached out and hovered his hand next to Will’s elbow, though he didn’t touch him. “To make that pretty mouth form the words ‘I want you to kill Hannibal Lecter’?”

“I did what I had to do for Beverly. And Abigail. And Georgia. To protect Alana.”

“It was easy, then?” Hannibal’s brow rose slightly, incredulous.

“Yes,” Will insisted.

Hannibal treated him to a self-satisfied half smile. “Liar,” he said. “Tell me, Will – when you heard Matthew Brown failed to kill me, were you relieved? I suspect so.” His gaze bored into Will’s eyes. Will felt frozen, unable to look away. “You were glad he didn’t succeed.”

“No.” Will forced the word from his mouth, a breathless hush.

“Yes,” Hannibal corrected, tone mild but dark eyes shining with triumph.

“Don’t do this.” Will’s mouth formed the words, with only a thin breath behind them, nearly inaudible. “Don’t ask me.”

Hannibal reached up and clutched Will’s chin in his hand. The skin-to-skin connection was immediately blistering, bringing Will’s blood to boiling and his body to betrayal. Will tried to look away but Hannibal held him fast, the hand near his elbow finally closing gently around his arm. “The thought of Matthew Brown putting his hands on you is repugnant, isn’t it? In fact, the only person you want… is me.”

“ *No* ,” Will vowed, a hollow oath.

“ *Yes* .”

Will stumbled backward, trying to get free of Hannibal’s grip. Hannibal released him easily enough. “You’re a monster.”

“That doesn’t seem to bother you. Not enough.” Hannibal stepped forward, cutting the distance again. “You’re capable of lying to yourself, in this moment. But not to me.”

“I don’t… I can’t…”

“You once begged me not to lie to you, Will. Won’t you extend yourself the same courtesy?” Hannibal reached out slowly for Will’s face. Again, as it happened the first time they’d met in this room, he did not close the distance, leaving it up to Will to give in or not.

And, God help him, he did. A trail of dead stretching behind him, an inhuman fiend intent on destroying him, and he still couldn’t stop himself.

Now who’s the monster?

He leaned into Hannibal’s hand, dropping his eyes demurely. “It’s true,” he murmured. *And as much as I hate you for it, I hate myself more.*

When Hannibal grappled him, Will gasped at the unexpected rough contact. Hannibal tossed him unceremoniously on the floor mattresses and stood over him, a looming shadow, suddenly all Chesapeake Ripper.

Will rolled onto his side, drawing his legs up. He watched, transfixed, as Hannibal fairly ripped off his tie, tossing off his jacket and hurrying through the buttons of his vest and shirt. He fixated on the graceful lines of Hannibal's collarbone, the quiver of the muscle beneath his skin, and the slits in his wrists, now stitched back together. He wondered vaguely what the scars would look like, if people would assume Hannibal had once been in a place where suicide seemed preferable. As if this creature would ever consider destroying himself.

"You clever boy," Hannibal said softly, kneeling down to stroke Will's hair back from his damp forehead. "Devious. What would you have done if your new friend had succeeded?"

Will dared to half-smile at him. "Whatever he wanted, I guess."

"You would have felt my absence," Hannibal whispered, the fingers in Will's hair suddenly clamping down and wrenching his head back. "Like a missing limb that can still feel pain."

"I knew that was a possibility," Will said breathlessly as Hannibal twisted his fingers harder, mirroring the twisting he felt in his heart, fury and desire and the awful empathy. Even after Beverly, after Abigail, after Georgia and all the others, and the sounders before that. Even after tricking Will into eating human flesh, and framing him for murder. All of this, and really, he hadn't wanted Hannibal to die. Or, at the very least, he'd always been open to the concept of Matthew Brown failing. All of this coalesced in a hot ice that enveloped his entire body. Will could not see any other ending to what Hannibal had begun. And as for the ending of what had started the night they'd kissed for the first time, well – the only *denouement* was ruin.

Hannibal turned him roughly on his back, trapping his bound hands behind him, lowering himself down with a knee between Will's legs. He supported himself with one hand next to Will's head, the other closing around his neck. Will stared up into his eyes. The guile was gone. The naked pain and desire was evident.

"You would have been *haunted* by me," Hannibal insisted, growling at the word as he constricted Will's airway. "Would you really have sold this body to pay for my assassination? To a boy, barely twenty, who wouldn't have the *slightest* idea how to please you?"

Will smirked, though his breath wheezed in his throat. "Interesting that's what bothers you more than the murdering part."

"You disrespect yourself, but the greatest affront is to me." Hannibal moved in to bring their mouths together. Will turned his head to the side in denial. Hannibal snaked his fingers from Will's throat to his chin and forced his head back. "You would let someone like him have what is *mine* ." He crushed their lips together and was gratified with Will granting him entrance to his mouth. Hannibal's was hot and always, always sweet in a way Will couldn't identify. Hannibal broke the kiss at the first taste of blood. "It wasn't yours to give."

"You could have had me," Will told him once his lips were free. "Just like this, whenever you wanted, but you stuck me in here, and now you have to live with it."

Hannibal pressed his hands into the crooks of Will's elbows, pinning them to the stone floor beneath the thin mattresses, hard enough that he squirmed in discomfort, the bones fairly

grinding against the rock. Hannibal growled, coming at Will again with his mouth. Will tried to deny him again, turning his head to the side. Hannibal worked his mouth down around the corner of Will's, over the rise of his chin, and to his throat, sliding a hand down his chest to push the shirt up and over his head, tangling it behind his back above the cuffs. When he wrapped his fingers around the outline between Will's legs, Will threw his head back and betrayed himself with a sound of pleasure. Hannibal massaged him tantalizingly, licked his throat like a wolf softening its meal.

Hannibal put his face close to where Will's shoulder met his neck. "I can still smell him on you. His sweat, his breath… Yet you insist he never touched you."

"You said you could tell if I was lying."

"If he'd succeeded, what would you have done to him?"

"I'd let him do what he wanted with *me* ," Will told him confidentially as Hannibal's eyes widened, then narrowed as jealousy and anger wove together to blanket his gaze. "It would have been, ah, fair *payment* . Like you said—" The last word was contorted in a sigh as Hannibal gave up stroking him from pecs to navel and moved instead to lick him from the clavicle to the underside of his chin, hand slipping into his shorts.

"I'm sure he would have kept that pretty mouth of yours busy," Hannibal purred into his ear.

"Yeah, for about five seconds," Will murmured with a little grin.

"Why did he kill the bailiff for you?" Hannibal asked after he'd completed a slow swipe of his tongue along Will's collarbone.

"He cared what happened to me. Unlike you, he doesn't want me to die in here."

"Hmm," Hannibal breathed into his ear before climbing backward to pull off Will's shorts and toss them aside.

"You had a close call. Not, ah… too far off from Tobias Budge. Matthew, he uh – fared better. Got *closer* ." As he spoke, Hannibal toed off his shoes and peeled off his socks. He crept up on Will, ran a hot hand up his thigh, and was rewarded when Will trembled at his touch.

"I seem to be processing it in much the same way." Hannibal hauled Will to his knees, facing away from him. Will grunted in frustration, tried to pull away, but Hannibal held him by the hair with one hand, sliding his other arm underneath Will's and curling it up to yank his shoulder back at a painful angle. "Tell me why."

"I already told you."

"You told me you would have sold yourself for my death." Hannibal adjusted his grip, taking hold of the bindings and transferring his grip from Will's hair to his chin, wrenching his head backward. Will coiled beneath him, tried to slide a leg out, maybe to try and fling Hannibal away or momentarily loosen his hold. Hannibal's own foot shot out and drove his heel into

the back of Will's knee. A cry mounted the back of Will's throat but Hannibal closed his hand over his mouth, pressing his neck back at an even more agonizing angle. "Why would you? Certainly not for pleasure. Would it have been a fair trade, to give yourself over to a fumbling boy with no artistry, no vision?"

He slipped his fingers from Will's lips and he took several gasping breaths, allowing Hannibal to force him back on his knees again. Hannibal let go of him entirely and stood in one swift motion. Will lost his balance and fell on his shoulder again, still breathing heavily, now bare chest slicked with sweat, his neck shiny with the moisture left from Hannibal's tongue.

Will felt ice and fire simultaneously rush through his veins, and he let it come. No more guarded hardened heart. "Tell me why," Hannibal repeated, slowly unhooking his belt and sliding it free so it slithered into his hands, a leather snake.

"It was you or me," Will said, glaring up at him with a combination of anger and desire.

"That provides little insight," Hannibal said icily as he wrapped the belt around his fist.

"Don't psychoanalyze me," Will spat.

"Then do not *mock* me," Hannibal growled in response. "You will tell me."

"To *infuriate you* ," Will said, as if it was obvious. "Even after you were dead. I know you would have hated it, if I gave him that sort of payment."

"You wanted to hurt me," Hannibal reasoned, his grip on the belt loosening. "Dishonor my memory in addition to sending your proxy."

Will stared up at him through the strands of hair that insisted on falling over his eyes. "Too bad Jack made it in time."

Hannibal took him by the back of the neck and shoved him face-down onto the mattresses. He took his belt and tightened it around Will's arms just above the elbow to the point of visible discomfort and a pained inhalation of breath.

Hannibal moved back to examine his handiwork. Will panted on the ground, tried to roll over. He struggled for a minute and managed to get on his knees. He was slick with perspiration, flushed, the world suddenly bright with desperation and desire and fury. His open mouth was ready for more angry words, but also, he realized, an invitation. Self-loathing tapped him on the shoulder, but he ignored it completely. It would be back, but not right now.

"Have you come to the conclusion that your efforts are futile?" Hannibal inquired, almost politely, a veneer of civilization coating the primal desire that Will could easily see evidence of as he removed his trousers.

Will tossed his hair back again, though it stubbornly fell into his eyes almost immediately. "Yes," he admitted, acidly, begrudgingly.

“Then submit.” Hannibal knelt before him in a slow, fluid motion and reached out to touch his face. Will jerked his head away. “Have you learned your lesson? Or will you try to kill me again?”

“I don’t even know what I’m capable of,” Will challenged him, eyes alight, voice too bold and daring for his situation. “I don’t think you know either.”

Hannibal moved behind him and knelt, taking hold of the belt and Will’s hip to position him correctly before tearing his own undergarment free. Hannibal put a hand on the back of Will’s head and forced his face down on the rumpled mattress. Will turned his head to the side in order to breathe, but Hannibal kept him pinned, fingers locked in his hair. Will tried to squirm free but it was no use.

“Let me in, Will.”

“What—“ Will’s startled word eased into a powerful sigh of pain and adoration as Hannibal employed his fingers. Rough, too fast, too many fingers, and Hannibal’s hand in Will’s hair, lifting his head periodically before pressing it back down amid whispered degregations.

Will’s resistance melted away as Hannibal’s touches became less about suffering and more about discovery. He was surprised how understated the buildup was, and his climax seemed to come from the air itself, gathering like a storm.

Hannibal slicked himself with Will’s emission and pressed between Will’s thighs, right up against his groin from behind. This was new, and it felt unthinkably good. Hannibal reached around the front to grasp him, coordinating both movements.

Will felt Hannibal spill against his underside and immediately climaxed again in his own right.

Heavy breathing. The soft clanking of old pipes. Distant screaming of inmates bedeviled by nightmares. Hannibal sat next to Will’s crumpled body, his back against the wall, breathing hard, face smeared with emotion. He was as disheveled as Will had ever seen him, as uninhibited.

The regret came almost instantly in the wake of the pleasure. Tears welled up in Will’s eyes, burning along his lashes. A strange relief strung a necklace around his throat and he felt his body respond, the aches dissolving into mellow sweetness. Slowly he regained control of his breath, his mind finally clear. Will gave himself permission, in that moment, to be both things – in love with Hannibal, and wanting him dead. He had to exist with the duality. He understood that now.

If Hannibal noticed the tears, he made no sign. Will rubbed his face against the mattress in an effort to obscure them.

Hannibal finally came to him, a bit unsteady, and knelt to lift him by the belt around his arms. Will felt liquid inside, like a rag doll, spent sexually and spiritually. There was relief, surely, but the vacuum was filling itself with guilt, shame, regret. Still better than numbness, he supposed. They faced one another on their knees and finally, each allowed the other’s gaze.

Hannibal's expression was, as expected, unreadable. He reached out to cup Will's chin, drew their faces together. Will's lip trembled and he kept his mouth closed as Hannibal kissed him. "Open," Hannibal ordered, though his voice was soft. Will permitted him, accepted the penetration of his tongue, the final violation. His kiss was firm but tender, and his fingers on Will's cheek were gentle, not grasping. The hand in his hair caressed, did not twist or pull.

Hannibal drew Will to him, folded him into his arms, a hand on his lower back, the other behind his head. Will pressed his face into the place where Hannibal's neck met his shoulder. Somehow this embrace felt safe, despite Hannibal's capacity for harm. *Stockholm syndrome,* his brain told him. He expected the inner voice to scold him, but it was only sympathetic, and sweetly sad, merely informing him.

Hannibal released the back of his head and used that hand to free the belt from its painful place above his elbows. Will exhaled in relief, his shoulders screaming from the pressure they'd endured. Hannibal embraced him again, sliding his fingers through his sweat-dampened hair, and kissed his temple.

"You must stop this," Hannibal said softly, and Will could hear the words aloud with one ear, and within Hannibal's chest with the other. "You are dragging others with you. You forced the Ripper's hand once. Don't do it again, Will."

Will raised his face, fresh tears coming to his eyes. Hannibal dragged his thumb under Will's eye, edging the tears away. "You're right. It has to stop. It all has to stop."

It was Will this time who leaned in to be kissed, pressed in deeper. Hannibal held him so tightly his breath was restricted, his head swimming as he tasted Hannibal's lips, mired in Hannibal's ancient-world scent and his own angst-soaked sweat mixing with his other fluids. "Hannibal," he breathed into the kiss with the last of his air. "I can't — let it go— even if it kills us both."

Hannibal pulled back, passed a hand over his slick forehead, pushing his hair to the side. "I know." He inhaled Will's scent, pressing his face into the hollow of Will's throat. "I'll come to say my formal goodbye in a few day's time. You can save your antipathy for then."

Hannibal patiently helped Will pull his shirt back over his arms and adjust his shorts before redressing himself. Will climbed aboard the elevator and Hannibal turned to watch him go as he positioned his tie. "I still owe you a reckoning, Dr. Lecter," Will told him. "And what happens in this room will *never* change that."

Hannibal looked up at him as the elevator began its ascent. "We'll see," he said.

...and CUT!

Now, restart the episode. Hannibal is ready to get his appetite back. He selects Councilman Isley (like Pamela Isely, Poison Ivy's real name – did you catch that? Because he makes him

into a plant?) and grafts him to a tree, removing his organs and replacing them with pretty but poisonous flowers. Hmm, someone's got some issues to work through, and the Chesapeake Ripper's killing again. Wouldn't you know it – Hannibal Lecter is also planning a dinner party. Jack begins to entertain some of Will's "crazy ideas" and takes food for sampling. Too bad it's just animal meat!

...stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 7: Yakimono

Chapter Summary

"I'm ready to resume my therapy..."

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Wandering Star” – Portishead

“Those who have seen the needle’s eye, now tread
Like a husk, from which all that was, now has fled
And the masks, that the monsters wear
To feed, upon their prey
Wandering stars, for whom it is reserved
The blackness of darkness forever”

This “cut unscene” directly follows the end of this episode. Will shows up to Hannibal’s office at his normal therapy time, with a new, polished look. Earlier in the episode, Will had broken into Hannibal’s house and held him at gunpoint. Hannibal managed to convince him not to shoot and Will flees without another word. But now he’s here for different reasons, it seems. Will says, “I have to deal with you and my feelings about you. I think it’s best if I do that directly.” Hannibal says, “First, you have to grieve for what has changed.” Will says that he’s changed. Hannibal points out that their relationship has irrevocably changed, and that the Chesapeake Ripper is over. Will says Miriam shot Chilton to get her life back. Hannibal asks Will what he’ll do to get his life back.

Easy now, Will’s mind whispered to him, every other word still in Hannibal’s voice. *If you catch a fish once and it gets away, it’s much harder to catch again.*

Will crafted his response deftly, the slight turn of his body, a calculated glance up into Hannibal’s eyes, an elegant motion of his head. “I’d like to resume my therapy.” He said it matter-of-factly, but with a touch of eagerness. Without waiting for a response, Will took his same seat and rested his arms on the chair. Hannibal’s face let a tiny expression escape – one of suspicion clouding over hope – before claiming his own seat and crossing his legs, lacing his fingers together to rest on his thigh. He looked at Will as if trying to read him. Will remained immobile, but let the flicker of a smile across his features.

“Where shall we begin?” Hannibal asked.

“With a glass of wine?” Will suggested, nodding to Hannibal’s ruby pour.

“Forgive me. I should have asked.” Hannibal went to the elaborately carved hutch to retrieve a glass for Will. He poured it and returned, handing it to him before reclaiming his chair and setting his own glass aside, untouched for the moment.

“How have you been adjusting to life outside?” Hannibal was all therapist now, all Dr. Lecter, so Will answered in kind.

“Not well.” He ran the knuckle of his forefinger over his lip, a brief touch to bring Hannibal’s eyes that direction. It worked. “The adjustment’s been, ah… difficult. I think you saw that firsthand in your kitchen the other night.”

Hannibal’s eyes flickered. Will took a moment to savor the memory of Hannibal turning his face away from the barrel of the gun; for all his wading through the mire of death, years and years of dealing it, he didn’t want to face his own, take the bullet between the eyes, able to see in that moment what he had made Will become. It would have been an execution, and Hannibal requested the hood.

“Your world shrank when you were imprisoned.” Hannibal lifted his wine glass to his nose and swirled the liquid before dipping closer to the rim to take in the bouquet. “Your life organized for you — when to eat, sleep, bathe.”

“When to see you,” Will added.

“Now you are presented with choice. It can be paralyzing.”

“I don’t feel… that coming to see you is a choice. More like an inevitability.” Will copied Hannibal’s motions with the wine glass, down to the way he held the stem. They took a simultaneous sip. Will paused along with Hannibal to let the taste flower over his tongue. Cherry, vanilla, a hint of pepper and earth. “You feel the same way. Why else would you keep my standing appointment free?”

“Hmm.” Hannibal gave a slight nod, setting down his glass. “As you say. You appearing in my doorway was inevitable.”

“Not sure if you heard,” Will began, lifting his wine to look at the light from the fireplace through the jewel-toned liquid. “Edward Cummings and Ron Sullivan are no longer with the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

Hannibal’s brows moved up a centimetre or two, no more.

“Yeah, it’s such a… *coincidence* – Ed’s furnace malfunctioned and he died of carbon monoxide poisoning. Terrible ah, *freak* accident. And Sully, well, he just didn’t show up to work one day. Looks like he took an impulse vacation to Costa Rica.”

“It’s a stressful line of work. I’m sure a vacation was in order.”

Will chuckled silently, a wry twist to his lips, though not an unpleasant expression. He took another drink of wine and balanced the glass on the arm of the chair, letting his fingers caress

the stem, up, and down.

“How are the dogs?” Hannibal deftly moved the subject away from the dead orderlies. “Did Alana keep them well?”

“Very well.”

“They remember you.”

Will nodded.

“Alana told me that Winston – the one you stole, if memory serves – used to run away from her and return to your house in Wolf Trap to wait for you.”

Will brushed his freshly cut hair behind his ear, hoping to guide Hannibal’s eyes to it. It worked. The appreciative glance was brief but obvious enough. “He did. Now he doesn’t have to wait anymore. He, ah, he won’t leave my side. Won’t let me close a door on him. I think he’s afraid I’ll, uh, disappear.”

“Like you did before.”

“Mmm,” Will nodded again.

“Professor Uneo had Hachikō, and you have Winston.”

“Except I came back.”

“Not the same.”

“No, not the same.” Will stood and moved nonchalantly towards Hannibal’s desk. He cast an eye over the drawings. One was a study of “Fallen Angel” by Alexandre Cabanel, where Lucifer lay nude on a cliff side, his arm in a defensive position that obscured most of his face. Unlike the original print that was in one of the open books on the desk, the angel’s hair was dark and his eyes were more melancholy, haunted. Familiar. Will realized he was looking at a version of himself cast out of Heaven.

His fingers trembled on the wine glass; he took a sip to disguise the minuscule movement. Turning, Will rested his backside against the corner of the desk and looked at Hannibal again, trying to send an invitation with his posture, though nothing too forward. It had to be a delicate dance.

“I see you received my packages,” Hannibal said, watching him carefully but remaining in his chair.

The morning after Will had arrived home, there had been several boxes waiting on his doorstep. He’d only opened them after several hours of working up his courage and supplementing it with whiskey. In case they were body parts. Because that was his life now.

The boxes did not, in fact, contain body parts, but clothing and toiletries, along with locally made, organic dog biscuits. Will didn’t need to look at the card to know who they were from.

Somehow, Hannibal had known that most of Will's stuff was still in the lab at the FBI, trapped in a limbo of chain of evidence and red tape. He'd be lucky if any of it was ever returned.

Initially, Will had taken the boxes to the end of his driveway and stacked them by where the truck came for his trash and recycling. After the confrontation in Hannibal's kitchen, however, he'd reclaimed them. Opened them. Wore them, as much as it made his skin crawl. Used the designer-brand shaving kit and left the Old Spice in the medicine cabinet. He treated his body like a fishing fly designed for a specific species, decorating it according to what his quarry was hungry for.

He had to admit, he very much liked the new herringbone overcoat and charcoal scarf.

"I did," he replied to Hannibal's question. "Thank you. Everything's still tied up in evidence."

"I thought it might be." Hannibal stood, and closed the distance between them. Will felt his heart pick up speed, but suppressed the excitement to keep his mind clear. "Imagine my surprise when you walked in here without the ship on the bottle." He stood before Will, within an arm's reach, and stopped. Will raised the glass to his mouth and sipped again, deliberately, feeling Hannibal's gaze climbing all over him, as direct as a touch, a blatant grope. "What do you think of my selection?"

"Doesn't matter much what I think." Will drained his glass and set it to the side. "How is it for you?" He reclined slightly, resting his hands against the edge of the desk and lifting his chin.

Hannibal closed the distance, and leaned in. He rested his fingers lightly against Will's arms, just above the elbow, only the shadow of a grip. Leaning forward with aching slowness, he hovered his face just above the slope of Will's neck, nose just below his ear, and inhaled deeply.

"It blends very well."

Will felt the same hot blush prickle up his neck and cheeks that always climbed over his skin when Hannibal was near, felt the radiating warmth of his almost-touch. Hannibal's breath tickled the curl of hair just below his earlobe.

Not yet.

Long game.

"Dr. Lecter?" he asked, soft yet conversational. "Could I, ah… bother you for a refill?"

Hannibal drew back with the same deliberation with which he'd leaned in, and released his feathery grip. "Of course." He bent in close again, and Will's breath stopped. But it was just to grab the empty wine glass, pulling away to return to the bottle that waited on the sideboard.

When he turned back, Will had moved over to the black statue of the stag, examining each of the points of its antlers. It was the larger version of the one he kept locked away in his mind, embodying all of his rage and desire for revenge, bringing it out only as needed. It was buried deep right now. Otherwise he wouldn't be able to be in the same room as Hannibal Lecter.

He reached out and pressed his finger into one of the antler tines. It wasn't sharp, but left an indentation. Hannibal had very likely bashed Tobias Budge's skull in with this, despite what the police report said about Budge falling and hitting his head during the fight. It was the stag he saw, the one with the iridescent ebony feathers, its shadow both a terror and a comfort. Fitting that it was used to murder the one person Will had to applaud Hannibal for killing.

He turned to tell him so, and Hannibal was there, right there, having crept up silently behind Will. Will started involuntarily, a small but significant movement that made Hannibal smile. Hannibal reached out and took the fabric of the salmon-colored dress shirt he'd given Will in his welcome-home package, stretching it flat against his stomach, his fingers hovering lightly at Will's hips. "I could only guess your measurements," he said. "This is just a little big. It was meant to taper."

"Seems fine to me," Will argued, though it was gentle, with a hint of play.

"These, however, fit very well." Hannibal's touch moved lower, one hand tracing the waistband of the well-made trousers around to the small of Will's back, the other drifting down to gather a handful of ass.

"You should check the inseam," Will suggested, leaning back to bring the wine to his mouth again. Hannibal complied, bending slightly to run his fingertips along Will's inner thigh, higher in tiny increments. Will tried on his best shy little smile and let his tongue go between his lips before edging out of Hannibal's grip, leaving him stranded in front of the stag statue.

"Will."

"Hmm?" Will drained his wine again and set the glass on the table next to his chair before wandering in an aimless way over to the ladder that led up to the second floor of Hannibal's office. He pretended to consider a book sitting on a small table on his way, then turned to lean against the ladder, reclining a few degrees and resting there as if it was the most natural thing in the world. He sighed gently and rubbed the back of his neck, letting his own fingers brush the base of his curls and edge down along his throat. Easily misconstrued as someone with a crick in their neck trying to work out a knot, but Will was entirely aware of what he was doing, and it was working. Hannibal followed him like Winston followed him, tracking him, making sure he wasn't going to disappear.

Will rested his hands palms down against the sides of the ladder and watched Hannibal move closer, leaving only a foot or two between them, invading Will's space with his scent. Will's fingers curled around the ladder in an effort to keep his hands to himself. It wasn't time. It was important that his manipulation feel as authentic as possible, but he had to keep himself at the brink of losing control. Everything had to play out just so – there was no room for mistakes.

Catch a fish once, and it was that much harder to catch a second time. Doubly so if the fish itself was a predator.

“Tell me, Will.” Hannibal edged closer, but didn’t touch him, not yet. “What do you hope to get out of your therapy?”

“Understanding.” Will shrank back as far from Hannibal as he could, the rungs of the wooden ladder pressing into his back. “I want my questions answered. I want to know what happens. Though I think I have a-a pretty good idea.”

Hannibal lifted one hand and reached for him. Will tensed, thinking Hannibal meant to touch his face, but he didn’t. Instead, Hannibal placed a hand against the side of the ladder at Will’s neck level, just above his shoulder, a deliberate barrier.

“What is it that you think you know?” Hannibal intoned, his voice dropping into a murmuring range.

“I think I know what the Chesapeake Ripper wants with me.”

“Do you?” Hannibal lifted his other hand and grasped the ladder frame on the other side, lower, right next to Will’s bicep, his fingers less than an inch away from flesh but not touching.

“I’m a part of his design.”

Hannibal closed the distance, leaning in, probably for a kiss. Will turned his head away, and Hannibal settled for nosing against the side of his neck to experience his new scent again. “Which part of his design?” The question was low and purring.

“The centerpiece.”

He could feel Hannibal’s lips against the underside of his jaw, working toward the inevitable conclusion of Will’s own. And damn, he wanted to turn his head.

But not yet.

Will timed his movement precisely. Hannibal released the ladder with his left hand, probably to put it in Will’s hair, and Will managed to slide right past him, off the ladder. Victory flared in him, fueling the boiling point of his blood, and it increased by several more degrees when he heard Hannibal’s barely-audible exhale of frustration. He paused to lay his fingertips against the back of Hannibal’s desk chair, long enough to say, “He wants me to transform, evolve into my next natural state, from humble larvae to something with wings.”

Hannibal abandoned the ladder and followed him with measured steps, though Will could sense the tension laced around his body.

“And once I have, I will be a truly fitting companion.” Will went to the sideboard to put more wine in his glass, and scooped up Hannibal’s cup on the way back, handing it to him. He raised a casual toast, and Hannibal touched his glass to Will’s. The ring of their surfaces

contacting echoed throughout the shadowy office, reaching the corners, the bookshelves above, filling all negative space.

“Why would the Chesapeake Ripper crave companionship?” Hannibal asked, sounding mundane and almost uninterested, a complete contrast to the slight tremor in the muscle of his jaw, his telltale giveaway.

“There’s a difference between being alone and being lonely,” Will said after he swallowed another mouthful of the pinot noir. “I think he’s finally accepted that. He never thought he could change it. Now he thinks he can. But, ah, I have some work that needs to be done. I’m sure he thinks I’m well on my way, but I still have several… attachments left to sever. A few *pesky* ideals I’m clinging to.”

Hannibal finished the wine and abandoned the glass on the table next to his chair. With each of his words, he edged closer to where Will stood next to his desk. “You’ve told me before that caterpillars must liquify before they can reassemble and emerge. Completely deconstruct in order to be reborn. Is that what’s happening to you, Will?” Close enough now to touch. Hannibal eased Will’s glass out of his grip and left it on the desk, then slid a hand around his waist, the other playing with the top button of his shirt. He flicked it open, then ran the pad of his finger along the flesh beneath until he came to another button, and opened it as well. “I suppose the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane was cocoon-like in its way.”

Will shrugged, as nonchalantly as he could now that Hannibal had opened another button and had a thumb against his nipple, which was very suddenly hard and pointed. “You say cocoon, I say tomb. Tomato, *tomato* .”

“Rising from the grave is a kind of rebirth.”

“Woulda been nice if I’d only been down there for three days,” Will said, a lilt of play to his words as Hannibal opened another button. “Jesus had it easy.”

Hannibal made a sound in his throat, not a word, just a soft hum as he put his hand on the side of Will’s face, enjoying, perhaps, his fresh shave, thumb tracing the line just above his stubble.

The very second Will saw his body tense to lean in for the kiss, he said, “I’m cold.”

“I can feel you shaking.”

He broke away. Hannibal let him go, but his frustration was more audible this time, though not much more than a sigh. Will went to the fireplace, knelt, added another log and stirred the embers. He wasn’t cold – far from it. The heat of the flames on his chest, unbuttoned to the navel, was scorching. When he stood, Hannibal was right behind him, but Will evaded and sat in one of the chairs in front of the hearth. Hannibal was left with little choice but to sit in the chair next to him, which he did, after removing his jacket. Will had made the fire too big, and it had gone from cozy to stifling in a matter of moments.

Will didn’t look at Hannibal as he spoke, choosing instead to focus on the flames. “You said I have to properly grieve for what has changed. I’ve changed. How does one grieve properly

for oneself?"

"The same way we grieve for anyone else," Hannibal told him. "At first there's denial and shock, followed by pain and guilt."

"Next comes anger," Will said. "Definitely experienced that one."

"I remember it well." Hannibal unbuttoned one of his shirt cuffs and showed Will the scar, stitches out but still shiny and pink, raised up on his skin. Will was very aware that he didn't re-button up, and took the moment to open the other cuff.

"Bargaining," Will recited. "I told myself if I could just avenge Beverly, then Alana would be safe. Everyone would be safe."

"You offered the higher power the last of your innocence in exchange for revenge and the salvation of others." Hannibal didn't look at him, but loosened his tie and opened the top button of his shirt. Maybe for comfort. Maybe for something else.

"Didn't work." Will's veins felt full of liquid fire, ready to erupt. Still, he kept his voice even, detached. "I didn't, ah – I didn't *fulfill* my end of the bargain."

"You gave up your innocence readily enough. It was Matthew Brown who didn't hold up his end."

Will chuckled, thumb under his chin, deliberately running the side of his index finger over his mouth, methodical in its intent to look nonchalant. "That he didn't."

They marinated in a charged silence. Hannibal finally broke it, Will's patience holding out. "Next comes depression. A time of deep reflection, and a crushing loneliness."

"I remember it well." Will looked at him for a moment, laden with meaning, before turning back to the fire. "I might still be there."

"Certainly reflective." He might have been trying to be subtle, but Will immediately tracked Hannibal unfastening the buttons of his vest. "You said there's a difference between being alone and loneliness. Where do you find yourself?"

"My loneliness is…" Will chose his word carefully. "Palpable," he settled on. "Not to be-be *trifled* with."

Through his peripheral vision, Will swore he saw a shift in Hannibal's expression, a lingering tenderness.

He went on. "Bev's dead. Georgia's dead. Abigail's dead. Everyone else in my life is either pushing me away because I tried to kill you, or has their doubts about whether or not I've really been exonerated." He ran his fingers along the soft curve of the chair's arm, deceptively aimless. "So you tell me, Dr. Lecter – am I alone, or lonely?"

"Your loneliness has become understandable to you." Hannibal echoed himself, calling back to their shared moments in the Hobbs family kitchen, standing on Abigail's bloodstain. "It is

a byproduct of your uniqueness, Will."

"It's a byproduct of being with *you* ," Will shot back before he could stop himself.

His anger-tinged outburst didn't seem to faze Hannibal whatsoever. "If you're with me," he said, "then you aren't alone." He paused. "Or lonely."

"That's debatable."

Stop. You're going to lose him.

Will's antipathy seared him from inside, evading his attempts to tamp it down. He took a breath and tried desperately to refocus, staring at the dancing fire.

"I suppose you could settle the debate. If you wanted," he said, turning to meet Hannibal's eyes. They were dark, luminous, reflecting the flames that licked across the logs in the fireplace.

"I've made my intentions clear. You've been choosing to ignore them." Hannibal closed the space between them and knelt next to the chair. His innate unnaturalness was confusingly counter-intuitive to the strange, shimmering earnestness in his eyes.

"And what are those intentions, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal turned his head a few degrees to the side. "We know each other well enough that you understand me perfectly." He paused. "Look at me, Will."

He obeyed, though this threatened to slice him open, let everything out, the rage and the fierce, stubborn love that clung to life no matter how many times Will tried to murder it.

"Come home with me," Hannibal said softly, reaching out to put a hand over his arm on the arm rest of the chair.

Will sighed out a wry laugh, but he did not remove his hand from Hannibal's grasp. "Not worried that I might try to kill you again?"

"It concerns me. But you're very good at compromising my judgment. You always have been."

Will scoffed almost-silently.

"You didn't shoot me because you couldn't," Hannibal said, so softly, but with an undercurrent of force that turned it into a growl. "I have the sense that tonight will be no different." He watched Will's face in silence as he looked away, at the floor, then the ceiling. "Come home with me," he repeated.

"Getting yourself into a compromising position?" Will challenged, dropping his other hand to the armrest. "Crimes of passion are more common than you think."

"Destruction is a small inconvenience, and worth the price."

“I’m not sure what I’m capable of, Dr. Lecter.”

“We can discover that together, “ Hannibal insisted, putting his other hand over Will’s, trapping it, like the other, against the thick mahogany chair arms. Part of an inch at a time, he moved his fingers up until his palms rested on Will’s wrists, and then deliberately wrapped his fingers around both flesh, bone, and the slender wooden arms of the chair.

“What comes after depression and loneliness?” Will asked him, catching his mahogany gaze again.

“Reconstruction,” Hannibal told him, and Will was struck by the chord of desire in his voice, of vulnerability. “Working, I hope, towards acceptance.” The flicker of a smile.

“I suppose that’s what… his, ah, *design* is all about,” Will said. “Forcing me to accept what I’ve become.” He tried to pull one of his arms free from Hannibal’s grip, but Hannibal’s winter fingers constricted, crushing his wrist down against the wooden arm of the chair.

Will tried again to pull free, convinced that Hannibal would take the cue and let him go. But he didn’t. He tried once more, but Hannibal didn’t move, eyes still fixed on his. “Dr. Lecter, I need you to let go,” he said evenly. Red flags in his mind, but they were easy to ignore. He should be scared, angry, or vengeful even, but the sensation was so far away, so difficult to grasp. What he had accepted, though Hannibal didn’t know it, was that he was the bait, and he had to offer something convincing, something to entice the monster. But it had severed him from his good sense, and he was well aware of it. The flicker of feeling that did grow was one of recklessness.

“I wouldn’t say ‘ *force* .’ I would say ‘allow’.”

“I meant what I said,” Will stated flatly.

The grip on his wrists tightened, pushing the threshold of pain.

“I’m sure the Chesapeake Ripper sees it as freeing me,” Will assented, grimacing slightly as the pressure increased again. “And I should be thankful.”

“We cannot always see when someone is doing for us what they think is best.”

Will grimaced, trying his left arm. “And what do you think is best for me, Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal shifted closer, though his grip was unwavering. He tilted his head slightly to the side, his hair — rich brown infused with steel — brushing against one cold, beautiful, sharply cut cheek. “I think it best you leave, Will.”

Will balled his right fist and pulled again, but nothing came of it. Perspiration prickled his hairline and he felt his heart leap out of its languid hatred and landing in desire. “Probably for the best.”

“Admittedly, I am not interested in what is best. Not tonight, with you here like this.” Hannibal’s eyes flashed and his grip tightened again, causing Will to inhale sharply as he

sensed his wrist bones grinding into the mahogany chair arm. “Come home with me.” Hannibal’s voice was low, all velvet seduction.

“And if I say no, you’ll — what? — break my arms?” Will shifted uncomfortably in the chair and Hannibal’s grip lessened, but only slightly.

“I held you here so you would be still and listen. I’ve said my piece.” Hannibal paused. “Now I await your answer.”

Will was blindsided by the slide of desire that rippled through him, an unexpected burst of feeling that cut through everything else. Hannibal tilted his head a centimeter further. “Interesting,” he murmured.

“What is?” Will breathed the question as Hannibal leaned closer.

Hannibal didn’t answer him, at least not directly. Keeping his grip on Will, he shifted his position to bring them closer still, studying Will’s face, listening, perhaps, to his breathing. He paused, their lips inches apart. “Perhaps the decision isn’t yours,” he said. “Perhaps, deep down, you prefer it that way. Submitting to another’s will has its own simplicity. A sweetness. A freedom in letting go, shrugging off any responsibility for your own fate.”

“I can be better than that,” Will whispered, closing his eyes, brow furrowed. “I should be better than that—”

“Stop applying morality where none exists.” Hannibal’s words and his cool breath slid over his lips. “If not with me, where will you go? Back out to your black fields, your little house a ship on a vast, empty sea?”

“I don’t know,” Will blurted, turning his face instinctively to the side.

“Very well. One decision at a time. Do you *want* me to release you?” Hannibal drew back and readjusted his iron grip. Will forced himself to face Hannibal head on, his fingers numb, trembling. “Or would you rather I hold on?” came the next half-whispered question.

Will’s head swam and his breathing quickened another notch. The world seemed to be in terrible sharp focus. He could count the pale hairs of Hannibal’s arched brow, the lashes that ringed his dark eyes, the minuscule, subtle change in color between the skin of his cheek and his lip. His scent was overwhelming — something resembling a mixture of bay, incense, and pine that smelled better to him every time he sensed it.

“I want you to kiss me,” he admitted, his own voice far away in his ears, a rushing sound that could only be his own blood nearly obliterating it. “Whether or not you let go of me is up to you.”

A slow slice of a smile crept along Hannibal’s haughty, full-lipped mouth. With deliberate slowness he loosened his hold on Will’s right wrist until his fingers merely hovered against the bruised flesh, then slid free, coming to rest on Will’s thigh. He leaned closer, and Will traced his recently released hand tentatively through Hannibal’s hair before curling his fingers around the back of his head. Hannibal allowed himself to be guided forward by this

gentle touch until his mouth was less than an inch from Will's. Then he resisted and leaned back once more, getting fluidly to his feet and letting Will go entirely.

"Maddening, isn't it?" Hannibal asked as Will got to his feet as well.

"Come here."

Hannibal caught him by a handful of his opened shirt and held him at arm's length. "If you want it," he said, "come home with me."

"You keep insisting." Will stayed where he was, and was rewarded when Hannibal let go of his shirt and pressed his palm against Will's bare skin, a warm, forceful possession. "Should I be worried? Is tonight the night you kill *me* ?"

"I suppose neither of us knows the other's intentions in their entirety." Hannibal's hand crept up to Will's face again, a gentle caress, before brushing his hair a few centimetres across his forehead. "Is it a risk you're willing to take?"

Will did not know how he would respond until the words were already out of his mouth. "Yeah, it is."

"Good." Hannibal stepped closer and busied himself buttoning Will's shirt up again, and then his own vest and cuffs. "Don't forget your coat."

***

It was unreal, being back in Hannibal's house after everything that had happened there. The feeling hadn't really sunk beneath the surface the last time Will had been inside – breaking in to stick a gun in Hannibal's face. He'd been acting on pure vengeful instinct, his vision shaky and stained red. Now he felt calm, the world soft at the edges, only partially focused, sleepy, like a dream sequence on one of Aunt Louise's soap operas. Somehow he was on the couch, a whiskey in hand.

"You said you were using music to, ah… metabolize what happened." Will put his drink to his lips, but only pretended to swallow. This entire scenario felt too comforting to be what it appeared, and he'd had enough back at the office. "What did you mean?"

Hannibal turned from the sideboard where he had poured himself a glass as well. "Composing."

"Harpsichord, or theremin?"

"Harpsichord." Hannibal seemed genuinely pleased by his interest.

"Theremin's interesting, I guess." Will raised his glass again, but took a real drink this time. "An interesting choice for you, more than anything."

“How do you mean?”

Will cocked his head with a little smile. “It’s, ah… not a harpsichord. Or a violin or-or a flute, even a guitar. More suited to old sci-fi movie scores than chamber music.”

“Many didn’t take it seriously as an instrument for a long time. Even now, it has a small niche. But once in the hands of a former violin virtuoso, the world saw its real potential. They saw its wonder, plucking notes from the aether.”

“No limits. You can play any note you want.” Will tried not to ruminate on the thought of Hannibal’s hands expertly creating sound out of thin air, how deft and sure they were. “So why harpsichord? Seems difficult to transition from something with, ah, unlimited possibilities to such… constraint. You can’t even decide how long to play the note for.”

“You tell me, Will. How does it feel to move from constraint to freedom, or the reverse?”

Will smiled genuinely for the first time in what felt like months. As soon as it happened, he pushed it away, but he knew Hannibal had seen.

“Would you like to hear my composition?”

Will nodded, and Hannibal got up, leaving his drink and his jacket behind. He settled on the harpsichord’s bench and opened the lid. Pausing a moment, he took a steady breath, rolled up his sleeves, then began to play from memory.

Somehow, Will found himself standing. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the stag cross the doorway that led to the kitchen, a deliberate silhouette, ruffling its feather-fur as it went. Like the magnetic field generated by a theremin, Will was compelled by something invisible to close the space between himself and Hannibal. He stopped just short of the bench, watching Hannibal’s hands as they moved across the keys.

The music was elegant, of course, but every few measures or so, a note was *wrong* . The last time Will had had any formal music training it’d been in Aunt Louise’s church choir, but he knew enough to know how a note should hit. Just when the melody drew the listener in, it would unseat them from a place of comfortable expectation, or even pleasure. It grew increasingly unnerving as the song progressed, but Will felt drawn to it just as strongly. It ached in just the right way. A way that was familiar to him. Like home.

Before he’d fully processed what he was doing, Will’s hand stole out to touch Hannibal’s shoulder, feeling out the curve of its muscle and bone beneath the fine fabric of his shirt and vest. He bent and put his lips against the side of Hannibal’s face, letting them drift over the cut of his cheekbone, around the curve of his jaw and along his neck. Meanwhile, his free hand edged around the vest, pressing into Hannibal’s chest, belly, lower, coaxing out the desired response.

Hannibal didn’t miss a beat in the music, even as Will’s hands grew bolder. At last, the song ended, and he calmly rested his palms on his knees. He leaned back into Will, who arched over him from above, at last bringing their lips together in an upside down kiss, abstract in composition but gentle, almost chaste. For now.

The first kiss on free soil. Will broke it off to unbutton Hannibal's vest from his position, his chin on Hannibal's shoulder. He could feel Hannibal's smile against the side of his face as he put his fingers back on the keys and played Bach instead. Will pulled at the buttons of the shirt next, and Hannibal stopped playing, put his hands over Will's instead. "May I make a suggestion?"

Will made a sound of assent as he trailed his lips along the back of Hannibal's ear.

"We call a truce."

Even in this moment, the idea felt like a betrayal of everything he valued, everything he hoped, deep down, he still was. Will stepped back and Hannibal let him go, waiting a moment before standing from the bench and turning to him. "You don't find my proposition agreeable." Statement, no question. As usual. "Would that upset your plans to kill me, Will?"

"No." The tip of Will's tongue touched his lip where Hannibal's mouth had been moments before. "We can call a truce. But only for tonight. Tomorrow. First light. Things are the way they are."

"Terms I can accept."

They came together in a series of tentative moments, testing the waters of the truce. Hannibal reached out first to take Will by the hips, and he returned the embrace, resting one hand on Hannibal's shoulder, the other on the side of his face. The kiss mirrored their uncertainty until it didn't. Will's rancor was overcome in a great rush of memory-feeling, a kind of tangible nostalgia. He wanted him back, the Hannibal he'd surprised with a guileless drunken kiss, the one that never failed to make him feel safe. Under the light of this truce, basking in its warmth, he thought it was almost possible. He wrapped his fist around Hannibal's tie and kissed him, couldn't stop, had no desire to.

At last, they broke free for a brief interlude of heavy breathing. "Upstairs," Will said, somewhere between a suggestion and an order. Hannibal seemed more than willing to comply, and they quickly mounted the stairs.

There was something different about Hannibal's bedroom. Will couldn't put his finger on it. Everything seemed to be in its place, but there was some kind of presence he couldn't account for, an unseen imprint left behind by something or someone else. But Will didn't have time to contemplate it, not with Hannibal pressed up against him now from behind, finishing what he'd started in the office and finally getting Will free of his shirt. This he draped with a certain amount of care on the bench at the end of the bed before circling Will from behind again to kiss the back of his neck, nuzzle into his hair, run his fingers along the slope of his throat and over the curve of his shoulder, briefly caressing the knife scar on his rotator cuff, then the exit wound Jack's bullet had left behind. "A body is a map," he whispered against Will's neck. "It tells a story."

"Something tells me I'll have a few more chapters before this is all over," Will murmured, turning in his arms to release Hannibal, at last, from his shirt and vest. He lifted Hannibal's wrist to his lips and kissed the scars, one after the other, testing their texture with his tongue. This, not touching anything else, seemed to compel Hannibal to the brink of amorous

madness. He hurried Will out of the rest of his clothing, pulling at his own as well, no longer stopping to treat the garments with the respect they deserved. He gathered Will into his arms and used his own weight to drop them on the bed, bringing their lips together in a passionate furor.

Will pushed to reverse their positions, movements firm but non threatening. Hannibal let him and watched Will carefully as he stroked the expanse of Hannibal's chest, lingering at the nipples. "You trust me?" Will asked.

"I always keep my promises, and this truce is my word," Hannibal told him, running an appreciative hand through Will's hair. "Can you say the same?"

Will nodded, and slid down further to lift Hannibal into his mouth, relishing the taste, the textures, the powerful shift in scent as his arousal became too much to contain. What was compelling this time, Will considered as he worked, was the trust.

The interlude didn't last long, surprising Will at least, possibly them both. Then again, the foreplay had gone on for hours, it seemed like. Barely taking a moment to recover, Hannibal positioned Will under him and reciprocated ardently. Will's fear reared free for a few moments as Hannibal drew him in, flashing back to their last encounter and his own impulse to bite down. But within a minute the pleasure overrode everything else; Hannibal's tongue was everywhere front to back and he wasn't sure how much more he could take without losing it himself.

Mercifully, Hannibal paused to lubricate everything generously, a luxury they hadn't enjoyed when Will was locked up. Hannibal's fingers made a hasty exploration that Will cut even shorter by chasing his hand away and stroking him with an appetent hand, the other curled under Hannibal's arm and gripping at his shoulder. Will's small sound of discomfort trailed into a gratified sigh as Hannibal pressed in, following Will's demands. Will further telegraphed his insistence by closing his legs around Hannibal's hips, resting his heels against his back, until he was in deep enough that Will could cross his ankles. Most gratifying of all was Hannibal's face, the sounds he made as he moved. No Chesapeake Ripper here. A power that was powerless, a myth rendered mortal.

Their coordinated movements rocked Will against Hannibal in multiple ways and sections of his anatomy, creating a varied, layered sensation that was almost too much to bear. Added to the mix was the thrill of the risk, the possibility that he or Hannibal might break their vow of peace. And deep within, a ray of weak but stubborn light shone on the part of Will that had fallen in love with this man, the part of him that he'd actually known. While it hadn't been the entire truth of Hannibal he'd loved, the part he'd been allowed to see, those pieces were authentic, as was the love he felt for them. A love he was going to have to murder in order to claim his prize.

That was, of course, if he could get Hannibal to take the bait.

So far, so good. So fucking *good* –

White light. Will arched his back so hard and so fast that Hannibal nearly lost his grip on him, hands sliding against his sweat-slicked skin. A sound he barely recognized tore from his

throat. His sudden seizing did Hannibal in just as quickly, and he collapsed, weak and sweating in his own right, body splayed out over Will's, one hand cupped behind his head, the other twisting intermittently into a pillow as the aftershocks came and went.

Will's chest was constricted by Hannibal's weight, and he couldn't draw a full breath. Still, he made no move whatsoever to ease his position. This is what he wanted. To drown. Just like this.

Will hadn't made the truce with Hannibal. He'd made it with the part of himself that wanted Hannibal dead. And that part was silenced in this moment, diminished to a pile of ashes.

After a long stretch of hard breathing, Hannibal groaned softly and shifted, slipping out, lifting himself wearily on his hands and elbows and sliding a bit to the side, allowing Will full use of his lung capacity. He descended for a kiss, soft and breathy, then firmer, deeper. It only ended when Hannibal could no longer resist the siren call of Will's neck, which he seemed compelled to burrow into, smell, kiss, brush with his teeth.

Will found himself wedged beneath Hannibal's arm, head resting on his chest, hand pressing over his heart with Hannibal's over it, fingers threaded together. The very position made him ache. This was how they used to lay before. Before Will knew what Hannibal was capable of. Back when they were Abigail's fathers, and the worst scenario Will could imagine was either everyone at work finding out about them, or Hannibal actually making good on his "just friends" threat. Times that seemed so distant, as though they happened to someone else entirely, and so near, as if this moment could be added to them.

Can I borrow your imagination?

Will conjured the fantasy, and let himself believe it. It had all happened differently, and this was *their* bed.

Hannibal must have believed it on some level himself, because he was asleep within minutes, the untroubled slumber of someone with a clear conscience, someone who did not have an enemy tucked so affectionately beneath his arm.

It felt like ripping off his own skin, but Will slid out of Hannibal's grip and then out of bed. He dressed in careful silence, then let himself have one last look at Hannibal's placid, sleeping face. Will desperately wanted to stay, but knew it wasn't possible.

Who knew what would happen at first light?

...and CUT!

Now you're ready for the next episode, where Will grapples with his feelings about Hannibal as he works a case that feels painfully similar. Oh, and a social worker crawls out of a horse.

...stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 8:Su-zakana

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal rush to Peter Bernadone's aid, and get to see his social worker climb out of a horse. Will almost shoots the villainous Ingram, but Hannibal stops him. Will nearly killing someone seems to have put Hannibal in quite the mood...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “My Body is a Cage” by Arcade Fire

My body is a cage
That keeps me from dancing with the one I love
But my mind holds the key…
I'm standing on a stage
Of fear and self-doubt
It's a hollow play
But they'll clap anyway…
You're standing next to me
My mind holds the key
I'm living in an age
That calls darkness light
Though my language is dead
Still the shapes fill my head
I'm living in an age
Whose name I don't know
Though the fear keeps me moving
Still my heart beats so slow
My body is a cage
We take what we're given
Just because you've forgotten
That don't mean you're forgiven
I'm living in an age that
Screams my name at night
But when I get to the doorway
There's no one in sight
I'm living in an age
They laugh when I'm dancing with the one I love
But my mind holds the key
You're standing next to me
My mind holds the key
Set my spirit free”

> This “cut unscene” takes place a couple of hours after Hannibal and Will see a social worker climb out of a horse. Hannibal prevents Will from killing Ingram in Peter’s name. In one of the greatest shipping moments of the series, Hannibal puts his hand on Will’s face and says, “For all my knowledge and intrusion, I could never entirely predict you. I can feed a caterpillar and I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.”

Statements taken.

Lies told.

The man birthed from a horse locked in shackles and borne away in the back of Jack’s SUV, raving about how Hannibal and Will were the crazy ones, and he was the real victim. Jack’s face was stony and merciless, his eyes pure fury as he glanced at Will in the side mirror before taking off. No one was going to listen to a man accused of killing sixteen women and leaving them in shallow graves. Will well knew that it didn’t matter if Ingram had been convicted of the crime yet or not.

Slowly, the red and blue lights died out. Peter Bernadone sat in the back of an ambulance, a blanket around his narrow, hunched shoulders. A gray cat with luminous yellow eyes perched in his lap, affectionate but vigilant.

Will clicked off the flashlight he’d borrowed from a state trooper and handed it back to her before approaching Peter with deliberate steps, keeping his posture and demeanor gentle.

“D-did you… did you find any more of my a-animals?” Peter asked, his voice soft but hopeful.

“No,” Will said with a small shake of his head. “I’m sorry. I tracked your dog as far as the creek. But he’ll probably come home. I’ll– I’ll come back and check for him.”

“T-tell my neighbors d-down the r-road,” Peter suggested. “They can k-keep-keep a lookout.”

“I will,” he promised.

Peter nodded, his fingers methodically stroking the cat’s head and neck. The state trooper gave Will a look that clearly communicated her desire to wrap things up. “They’re going to take you to the hospital. Get you checked out,” Will told him. “Make sure you’re okay.”

“I’m not c-c-coming home, am I.” It was phrased as a question, but didn’t sound like one. Peter leaned over and pressed his face into the cat’s fur.

“Not right away, no.” Will reached out and put a hand on his bony shoulder, giving what he hoped was a reassuring squeeze. “But I already called you a lawyer, a good one. She, ah, worked under my defense attorney.”

“I-I don’t… I can’t pay–”

“It’s taken care of. Just, ah, don’t say anything to anyone until you meet with her.”

Peter kept his eyes on the cat, stroking one of her ears between two fingers topped with ragged nails. His hands were still bloody from his work that night, sewing a monster into the belly of his murdered horse, her last act meant to be his poetic justice. “I-I guess t-t-that-that just leaves Janine.”

“I already found her a home,” Will said. “A good one. Provided she, ah, gets along with other cats all right.”

“She does,” Peter assured him. “She does, she’s-she’s very gentle, she wouldn’t hurt anybody.”

Used to be able to say the same thing about you. And about me, too, Peter.

As if on cue, Will saw Jimmy’s blue Honda pull up the rural drive, bouncing along the uneven gravel. “I’m sorry,” he said. “It’s time to say goodbye.”

Peter nodded. He pressed his face into the cat’s fur again, and whispered a long string of unintelligible words into her ear. When Will tried to lift her free, she resisted a moment until Peter ran a hand along her nose and back over her ears, calming her. She settled into Will’s arms, though he could feel the tension in her body.

“I’ll come see you once everything’s, uhm, sorted out.”

“I’m g-glad.”

Will stopped, having half-turned away.

“I’m glad you didn’t.”

Will looked at him, a stone of misery forming in his guts.

“Y-you told me I didn’t d-d-deserve to k-kill him. You didn’t, either, W-Will.” He pulled the blanket tighter around himself, his dark eyes somehow illuminated, at least in Will’s mind, with a kind of sacred light. “Why d-d-did you wanna hate somebody? I wish– I wish I didn’t hate, even him.”

Will glanced at the trooper. She’d moved several yards away and was talking impatiently into her cell phone. He stroked the cat absently, not meeting Peter’s eyes, their glimmering innocence. “I have someone,” he said softly, breath halting as it passed between his lips. “Someone who-who is doing to me – did to me what your social worker did to *you* . M-made everyone think I did something that I didn’t. Wanted to make sure no one ever believed me. Wanted to take me away from the things I loved.” He stroked the cat again. While he was far from a cat person, he could see the appeal. She was molding to him, rubbing her face against his jacket now, glancing up at him now and again with her lantern gaze.

“And you don’t h-hate-hate him?”

“No,” Will said, with a smile that felt more like a wound. “I wish I did.”

Peter hunched over, rocking, making intermittent eye contact. “You love him, don’t you?”

Will could only nod.

“Okay, folks, we gotta go.” The EMT came around the side of the ambulance after nodding to the trooper.

“Goodbye, Peter.”

“G’bye, Will.” Peter and the trooper got into the back of the ambulance. The EMT shut the bay doors and got behind the wheel, trundling the large vehicle down the narrow country lane.

Will approached Jimmy’s car with the cat in his arms. Jimmy got out, as did an attractive younger man with a head of carefully styled sandy hair and a square jaw. They were dressed down, and had probably been in for the night when Will had Zeller call.

“Hey, Jimmy. Thanks for coming.”

“Well, who is this precious princess?” Jimmy reached out a slow hand for the cat to sniff, which she did, and then briefly rubbed her cheek against the pad of his finger.

“This is, ah, Janine. Did Zeller…?”

“He explained the situation.” Jimmy tried petting the cat’s head, and she let him. “Oliver? Can you get the crate?”

“Sure.” Jimmy’s boyfriend retrieved a small travel crate from the back seat of the car. Will handed the cat over gingerly and Jimmy edged her into the crate so Oliver could secure the door. Janine let out a sad little yowl.

“It’s a good thing you did here tonight, Will.” Jimmy put a hand on Will’s shoulder. “You can tell Peter Bernadone, we'll take good care of her.”

“Did you need a ride home, Mr. Graham?” Oliver asked, all attentive Boy-Scout. Jimmy gave him an appreciative look.

They would go home to white wine and reality TV, to their shared bed and their shared life. In the morning they’d wake up, maybe get to have breakfast together, and go to work. Come home at night and argue gently about whose turn it was to feed the cats.

That will never be you. Hannibal’s voice in his head. *You are alone because you are unique.*

I’m alone in that darkness.

You’re not alone, Will. I’m standing right beside you.

Will glanced over at the Bentley. Hannibal waited patiently by the back bumper, watching him. Waiting to collect his prize.

And Will wanted to be collected.

He was bait, yes, but he wasn't in control. He was dangling on a hook. Jack was supposed to be minding the pole, but Jack Crawford didn't know what was happening under the water.

You hook him. I'll land him.

He wasn't sure Jack had the strength to reel in Hannibal. And he wasn't sure he had it in him to slice into Hannibal's mouth with the hook hidden within the bait, the betrayal beneath the sweet offering and the promise of sustenance.

Before, he'd told himself he was a method actor living his role. He thought of Hannibal's hand on his face, his words striking a chord deep within Will's heart. *I could never entirely predict you.*

I am becoming my role.

I am becoming.

"No," he heard himself saying, voice far away in his own ears. "I have a ride back. Thanks. For everything."

"Sure thing, Will. Drive safe." Jimmy and Oliver got into the car, Oliver resting the cat's crate on his legs. Will watched them drive out of sight.

Nowhere left to go. Will put his hands in his coat pockets, feeling the bulge of the gun in his waistband. He should have found it comforting, but now it felt wrong on his body, like a poisonous growth. A tumor that needed to be cut out.

Hannibal rounded the side of the Bentley and dared to open Will's door for him, like they were on some 1950s high school date. Will got in and methodically buckled his seat belt as Hannibal slid behind the wheel. Hannibal started the engine and Will shifted, unbuttoning his coat and pulling the gun free. He set it in the cupholder at his side and didn't look at it again.

Dark roads. Opera.

"You missed your turn," Will muttered as the road to the freeway came and went.

"I'm not taking you to Wolf Trap."

Will glanced over at Hannibal's profile, uplit by the dashboard lights like some kind of B-movie villain. "You want me to come home with you."

"Yes." A simple word, but Will could feel the size and the weight of it, made dense with the layers it contained.

“You stopped me from killing him because it wasn’t the reckoning I’d promised… both of us,” Will said, putting his elbow against the side of the door and resting his temple against his fist wearily. “I’m very unpredictable, apparently. Not afraid I might, uh, try to bring that reckoning to you while you sleep?”

“It’s a possibility,” Hannibal acknowledged, turning on the defrost as a light snow began to fall. “I suppose I’ll have to be interesting enough not to kill.”

Will let the words take him back in time, not so far temporally, but past centuries of love and agony. All the way back to that hotel room in Minnesota when Hannibal had brought him breakfast. It’d only been a few days since the night they’d been together for the first time. Will remembered the fear of discovery by their coworkers, of the embarrassment of everyone knowing he’d gotten drunk and slept with the therapist Jack had assigned to look after his mental wellbeing. All this the very first day they’d met. Even stronger was the fear of rejection, which had caused him to be inexcusably rude to Hannibal when he’d showed up with food that morning. Reject before one can be rejected, saving oneself the terror of real intimacy.

Well, that breakfast contained human flesh, so Will couldn’t really fault himself for his behavior that morning, though he hadn’t known it at the time.

He caught Hannibal glancing his way, a smile on his face that came and went, as if he was trying to control it. After a time, as if he couldn’t help himself, Hannibal lifted his arm and put his hand on the back of Will’s head, resting it between the seat and Will’s neck, curling his fingers gently through Will’s hair and stroking the soft skin at the top of his spine. At first, Will was rigid, mouth pressed into a dismissive line, but over time, he felt himself soften against the touch.

“Birth isn’t easy, Will. We can’t expect rebirth to be.”

“I’m not coming out of something as good and natural as labor pain,” Will told him dully, eyes on the swirling snow that went from shadows to pure white in the wash of the Bentley’s headlamps.

“Not born of blood and agony?”

“No,” Will said softly. “A coffin birth. Born out of death and rot.”

“You’re alive, Will,” Hannibal argued. “More alive than you’ve ever been, I surmise.” He looked away from the road just long enough to brush Will’s hair behind his ear, then replaced his fingers where they had been, working their way through the dark, twisted strands. “Perhaps you need someone to remind you to breathe.”

“I suppose you think that person is you.”

Hannibal released Will’s hair, then slid his fingers down Will’s arm to catch his hand. He lifted it gently to his lips, pressing a kiss on the most prominent knuckle. “Who else would it be?”

Will didn't have an answer for that, so he said nothing. Hannibal released his hand, and Will reclaimed it, still feeling the shadow of those lips on his skin.

Hannibal's house. Somehow, it had ceased to feel like a museum to him, taking on a kind of familiarity that was both welcoming and terrifying. There was a good chance someone – multiple someones, maybe even Beverly Katz – had died here. Yet, that was like home to him, too. The previous owner had died in his house in Wolf Trap, and his intermittent specter was just part of the decor now.

If ever a house was haunted…

When we catch him, and everyone knows what he did, no one will ever live here again. They'll tear it down and salt the earth.

Hannibal took Will's coat and hung it carefully in a closet in the foyer next to his own. "When did you eat last, Will?"

"This morning." His own voice sounded like someone else to him.

Hannibal looked at his watch. "After midnight. I suppose that means breakfast."

Will shot him a look, setting his jaw.

"Something light," Hannibal promised, reaching out to push Will's hair across his forehead, fingertips traveling behind his ear and along the line of his jaw, ending under his chin.

Will sighed with a nod. Hannibal dropped him off at the living room sofa and disappeared into the kitchen. Will went directly to the sideboard and poured himself a hefty drink of whatever was in the decanter, not caring what it was. It turned out to be scotch, and made him cough, but sent a powerful fire down into his stomach that calmed the trembling in his hands. He could hear Hannibal moving around the kitchen, the sound of eggs cracking. Will toed off his shoes and sank onto the sofa, curling his arm under his head for a pillow, and shut his eyes. Mercifully, he saw nothing in the darkness behind them.

I'm alone in that darkness.

You're not alone, Will. I'm standing right beside you.

He slept.

***

A hand in his hair, a liquid caress. Lips on his forehead, then against his mouth. Will opened his eyes. Hannibal knelt at his side, suit jacket removed, his shirtsleeves rolled up to the elbow. "Come and eat," he said.

Fuzzy-headed, in-and-out, Will obeyed without a second thought, getting to his feet and following Hannibal to the dining room.

It was no surprise, he supposed, that the spread seemed more elegant and curated than anything even a fine restaurant would create, but was actually simpler than Hannibal's table usually was. Through some magic, Hannibal had conjured crepes with a choice of raspberry or blueberry filling, topped with home-whipped cream and fresh mint garnish. These he served with espresso, frothed milk, and raspberry-chocolate shavings on top.

All vegetarian, as far as Will could tell. Or maybe it was full of people. Will couldn't drum up the energy to care one way or the other, drained from his confrontation with Ingram and all that followed.

"Thank you," he found himself saying when Hannibal pulled out his chair for him, and assisted him in drawing it back to the table.

"My pleasure, Will." Hannibal sat at the head of the table with Will on his left. Soft music in a major key played and they ate in silence. Will expected to find his stomach unwilling to accommodate food after what he'd seen that evening – a fucking guy climbing out of a fucking horse – but he cleaned his plate.

Hannibal insisted on clearing the dishes without his help. He returned a short while later to find Will still sitting at the table, his head resting on his folded arms. Will flinched when Hannibal put his hands on his shoulders, but the tension dissolved in a matter of seconds. "Come upstairs."

Will opened his mouth to say something. Protest, make a snide remark, say something with a double meaning, something cutting – but nothing came out. He let Hannibal slide his chair out and take his arm, guiding him to his feet.

In the bedroom, he avoided the bed itself, choosing instead to sink into one of the chairs by the fireplace. Hannibal seemed unconcerned as he moved around the room, carefully removing his tie and hanging it up, unlacing his shoes and replacing them in their cubby in the closet where he'd arranged his footwear by color. If Will thought it was possible, he thought Hannibal might have a… shit, a *spring* in his step?

And why not? He was getting everything he wanted. As usual. Reveling in it while other people, just as human as he was, if not more so, moldered in their graves. Graves he put them in. It was infuriating. It made Will want to get up and walk out of the room, out of the house, but he couldn't find the strength to move, emotional or physical.

Hannibal approached Will from behind and put his arms around his neck, leaning his elbows on the back of the chair, resting his cheek against the side of Will's head. "Will. Come to bed." Will didn't move, didn't respond, his mind a haze. "Or are you going to make me suffer for stopping that trigger tonight?"

"You oughta pay for a lot more than that." Still, despite the bitterness in his heart, Will leaned his head against Hannibal's cheek in a brief gesture of affection. Hannibal crept his fingers down Will's neck and along the collar of his shirt. He popped the first button open and slid his hand inside.

“I know why you stopped me. Still wish you hadn’t.” Will’s voice was even and unconcerned with Hannibal playing with his nipple.

“Trust me, Will. It’s better this way.”

Will reached up, his eyes unfocused, and stroked Hannibal’s hair momentarily before dropping his hand again.

Hannibal switched tactics. “It’s still snowing. Despite the cold.”

“We could build a fire.”

“Come to bed.” Hannibal ran his lips along the back of Will’s ear.

Will scoffed, near-silent “You saw what you saw tonight and you still..?”

“Nothing could deter my appetite for you, Will.”

Will craned his neck back and Hannibal took the opportunity to kiss him. “That’s, uh, a very interesting way to word it, Doctor.”

Hannibal stood up with a smile. “Unpredictable.”

Will stood as well. “I need a shower. I-I know it’s – but all I can smell is that horse.” Without waiting for Hannibal’s reply, he stripped as he approached the bathroom, leaving articles of clothing strewn in his wake. Not really knowing what he was doing or why he was doing it, he stubbornly turned on the water and leaned both hands against the wall on either side of the spigot, letting the faux rain pound down over his body in a soothing rhythm.

You hook him, I’ll land him, his mind reminded him in Jack’s voice, and it stabbed at him.

He had to keep up the game.

He *wanted* to keep up the game.

“Because it isn’t a game,” he whispered under the rush of the water. He was changing, little by little. Tonight – he’d nearly broken out of his chrysalis, ready to fly. The thought simultaneously thrilled him and filled him with disgust.

Cool hands reached around his midsection as Hannibal embraced him from behind. Will turned, startled by the sensation for a number of reasons. First, he wasn’t expecting Hannibal to join him again. Secondly, to Will’s complete shock, Hannibal was still fully dressed, having only abandoned his shoes, socks, vest, and tie earlier, as if he was in such a rush to come to Will that he simply didn’t care that he was now being soaked through.

“Will,” Hannibal said immediately, taking Will in his arms, a hand to the side of his face. “Help me understand.” He studied Will’s face, water streaming through his hair, transitioning it from heathered brown-gray to mahogany. “Are you all right?”

“I am now,” Will lied, hoping his smile wouldn’t betray it. He locked his realization deep inside of himself and focused only on the present moment. Hannibal kissed him, long and slow, reverent and sweet, then with more force, to the point of being nearly primal. Will fumbled with his belt for a few moments before Hannibal eased his hands away and undid it himself, allowing Will to pool his slacks at his ankles, stepping free. Hannibal watched him hurriedly unbutton the shirt, cursing at the slippery buttons and soaked buttonholes, a slight smile on his face at Will’s impatience. Will touched him, a firm grip, then attempted to get on his knees. Hannibal caught him by the elbows. “No.”

“Why not?”

“Not tonight.”

Will slicked his hair back against the water that caused it to fall over his eyes. “Your move, then.”

Hannibal embraced him and executed another of his thrilling kisses, then lifted him in another show of surprising strength so Will could fold his legs around his back. Gently, their mouths still together, he lowered them to the floor, spreading Will out on the tiles and then moving his pile of soaked clothing behind his head. The rain shower poured down over them in wave after wave of soothing warmth, creating the peaceful sound of a mountain waterfall.

Hannibal bent over him, knelt with his legs on either side of Will’s hips. Will ran his hands appreciatively down Hannibal’s muscled back, feeling the ebb and flow of their coils as he moved sensually against him, the water making his chilly skin warmer with each passing minute. Hannibal seemed to enjoy stroking him from the collarbone down across his chest, then around the small of his back, and along to feel his backside and the underside of his wet thighs. There was a sudden finger tracing a circle around his entrance and Will broke their kiss, craning his head back to gasp, the water dripping from Hannibal’s hair onto his neck.

Hannibal stopped, and Will relaxed back into the kiss again. Hannibal moved his lips away, around the corner of Will’s jaw and to his neck, then lower, coursing his tongue down the bony line of Will’s sternum. He paused only to move his mouth to the skin just above the angle of Will’s hip bone. It was here that his kiss turned into a bite, then a suction bruise. Will’s breath shot down his throat to his lungs and out again in a deep sigh, an uninhibited sound in response to the pain that wove in with his mounting pleasure. Hannibal licked this wound tenderly, and Will felt his skin quiver as if he were suddenly cold, though that wasn’t possible in the hot shower. Hannibal half-smiled, clearly pleased with himself, before lowering himself back to Will’s mouth.

“Hannibal,” Will whispered between his kisses. “H-Hannibal.”

He moved his lips away from Will’s lips and down his neck. “What now?”

“We’re going to flood this bathroom. My ass is directly over the drain.”

Hannibal sat up. “So it is.”

“Take me to bed,” Will requested. Hannibal got to his feet, turned off the water, and helped him up, then lifted him by the legs again. Will wrapped himself around Hannibal and kissed his neck as Hannibal carried him the few steps out of the bathroom to the carefully made bed. They trailed water the entire way, and dripped onto the bedclothes, falling against each other in a damp, passionate tangle.

Hannibal knelt over him now, one hand around his wrist, pressing it into the bed, the other gently stroking his hair back from his wet forehead. “How will you have me?” he asked softly. “Slowly? Gently? Or—”

“Rough,” Will requested. “But not painful.”

“As you wish.” Hannibal kept hold of one wrist, but left his other hand free, kissed his throat. Another tiny bite, so expertly done that it only registered after a few seconds. After retrieving the necessary product, Hannibal caressed him, then further back, before sending in a finger, then two. Will arched his back but Hannibal held him down by the neck, though he did not constrict his breathing further. Then he eased his way in slowly.

“Tell me if it hurts,” Hannibal whispered in his ear.

“You won’t hurt me,” Will found himself saying, in spite of *everything* , fondling the side of Hannibal’s face, pushing strands of wet hair behind his ear.

Hannibal kissed him gently, but followed it with a hard thrust that Will wasn’t expecting. “Keep going,” he panted as Hannibal looked to him for a response. Hannibal released his throat and took his wrist again, and Will used his other hand for leverage, curling it under Hannibal’s arm and clutching his shoulder with desperate fingers, the nails digging into the warm, damp skin. Hannibal edged him close, stroking him confidently in front in tandem with his hip movements, then backed off once, twice, three times.

“Do you still want to kill me, Will?” Hannibal purred into his ear just as Will opened his mouth to beg for release.

“Yes,” Will managed to respond. He was tantalizingly close again.

“Would you do it,” Hannibal asked through a strained growl as he took Will by the chin, pressing their lips almost together as he continued his movements, “when we are as close as we are now?”

“Yes–” Will finally climaxed, and he clenched Hannibal so tightly inside that Hannibal also lost control.

Hannibal collapsed on top of him, face pressed into his damp neck. Will stroked his hair, ran his fingers gently over the marks he’d left on Hannibal’s back, which were already fading before his eyes. He shivered. The warmth of the shower was disappearing, and now they were lying naked on top of the bedclothes in a room without a fire going.

“Still concerned with the horse?” Hannibal wanted to know.

“That was a ruse to get you to fuck me in the shower,” Will explained, a half-smile toying with his lips. “Got part of the way there.”

“Clever boy.” Hannibal propped himself up and then rolled off of him languidly, resting a moment before getting up to pull down the blankets and tucking Will inside. He padded over to the fireplace and built a fire. Something about it, making a fire to warm them while completely nude, was one of the most sensually poetic things Will had ever experienced. It was primal. It felt like survival, as if they were early humans in their cave, united against a savage world of predatory megafauna.

After the fire was built, Hannibal rummaged around in the drawers a moment before bringing Will a soft burgundy sweater and a pair of silk pajama bottoms that would have fallen off his hips if he’d tried to stand. Hannibal climbed into a similar sleep set. They clung to one another under the blankets, Will burrowing in and Hannibal spooning him from behind.

This, Will realized, was the cocoon.

Sure enough, Hannibal whispered through it. “It is one of the great joys of my life to watch you gain true understanding of yourself. To see your potential come true. Do you understand?” Hannibal asked against the back of his ear as he smoothed Will’s hair back, fluffing it every once in a while to dry it.

“I understand,” Will said softly.

Hannibal brushed his lips with his thumb, parting them gently, and kissed him in the snowy shadows that moved across the windows. He was asleep within minutes.

Just as Will was about to drift off himself, something on the pillowcase caught his eye. Gently, he reached out and managed to capture it between two fingers. Turning slightly in Hannibal’s grip, he held it up to the small light thrown by the fireplace.

It was a hair. A long, wavy, dark brown hair.

Alana Bloom’s hair.

… and CUT!

Now you’re ready for episode 9! It begins with a dream where Will murders Hannibal via the stag and the ropes against the tree. And Randall Tier is in the mix…

… stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 9: Shiizakana

Chapter Summary

Will killed Randall Tier. As he's standing over the body, someone comes through the front door...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Acid Rain” by Lorn

“Daylight
In bad dreams
In a cool world
Full of cruel things
Hang tight
All you
Nothing like a big bad bridge
To go burnin' through
Daylight
In bad dreams
In a cool world
Full of cruel things
Hang tight
All you
Nothing like a big bad bridge
To go burnin' through”

This “cut unscene” really exists in two episodes – “Shiizakana” and “Naka-Choko.” The episode break plays with the audience a bit, showing the lead up to Will’s fight with Randall Tier, and then cutting to his visit to Hannibal’s place to show him the body. In Episode 10, we get to see the fight scene and the aftermath where Hannibal is fixing up Will’s torn knuckles. This scene happens in the minutes after Will kills Randall Tier, but before he arrives at Hannibal’s house with the body.

Will got to his feet.

The house was dark, but he could make out the sharp edges of things from the moonlight that reflected off of the snow outside and seeped through the windows.

His little house hardly felt like a home. Not anymore. Now it was nothing to him. Now it was everything. Crime scene. Broken chrysalis. Violated sanctuary. Ghost ship. The primordial den where he'd dragged his prey to eat at his leisure. Heaven. Hell. Purgatory.

He knelt again, carefully, mindful of the broken glass scattered on the floor. Will leaned his face close to Randall Tier's, looking into his glassy eyes, observing them carefully until the last bit of light left them. Randall's jaw slackened entirely, leaving him gaping and motionless. Will inhaled, breathing in the rich notes of coppery blood and the last remnants of Randall's breath, which smelled clean and inviting, mixed with the dry scent of bone and the oily machinery of the creation he wore. Will touched the teeth on the headpiece one at a time, studying the specks of Randall's blood that marred them.

Will waited for the guilt to come, waited for the nausea, the disbelief, the twisting agony in his heart, the desiccation of his soul.

It didn't come. Instead, he felt… vibrant. Fully awake. Clear-headed, and alive, and completely attuned to every inch of his own body.

Buster whining. The other dogs were upset. Their keening was the only thing that could possibly draw him from his reverie.

Will went to the small dog and checked his wounds, murmuring soothing words. The scratches were superficial. Buster was more scared than anything, and had been laying on the ground in the woods as a show of submission, not because he was in serious medical danger. The other dogs gathered around him, whining, as he took Buster to the kitchen and quickly cleaned and bandaged his wounds, slipping him into a little doggy sweater to keep him from pulling the dressings off. At Will's command, the dogs went immediately to their kennel room and to their separate cages. Will secured them, then shut the door.

As he edged the door to the front room open again, he half-expected to see… nothing. That it'd all been a fever dream, that the encephalitis was back. Or that he'd really killed Hannibal, like he'd seen in his visions during… the act.

"The murder," he whispered. It was best to call it what it was, not dress it up with euphemisms. Beau Graham's mother, Granny G, had died when Will was 11 and they'd gone back to Louisiana for the funeral; he'd been astonished how many euphemisms he'd heard for her death. Passing on. Going home. To heaven. Passing away. The concept of being "gone." As if she would return. Well, the priest certainly promised she would, during the Rapture. It had needled Will. Granny G was dead. Her heart had ceased to beat. It was a biological condition, not a spiritual journey, and he wished people would just say it.

Randall Tier had not passed on, hadn't been called home. He was dead because Will had killed him. Arguably in self-defense, but once Randall had been subdued with the numerous punches to the head, Will hadn't needed to break his neck.

He'd done it because he wanted to.

And now, he felt it, the sweet euphoria. The *zest* Hannibal had once described to him. The power. It was more than doing bad things to bad people. There was righteousness, of course.

Being an avenger of innocent victims brought him immense pride, immense pleasure – it always had. Solving a crime, cuffing a murderer, it always felt good. But this feeling, now, was a thousand times more potent.

Killing Garret Jacob Hobbs had been like holding a match to a candle wick. This was igniting a bonfire. It was warm and primal like flames in the night, sparks against the dark. Will crept back to Randall's side and knelt, brushing away a piece of glass so it didn't cut into his knee. His hands were sure and calm, unbothered by any kind of tremor as he reached out and put the tips of his fingers against Randall's split lip. Still warm, though the blood had ceased to flow. Will lifted his hand to his mouth and tasted it. Salty and metallic, exquisitely fresh, and he absorbed the taste with every sense, not just his tongue.

This time he stuck most of his hand into Randall's mouth, still moist with spit and blood and the remnants of his last breath. He stood, lifting his palm to the snow-cast moonlight. The blood looked wet and black like spring earth, teeming with life beneath its surface, breaking free of winter like he'd broken free of his chrysalis. He put the pad of his thumb against his lips and tasted it again with all the reverence of a communion ceremony.

The door to his house opened. The dogs barked furiously for a few moments at the sound, but then quieted, as if they knew who was here. Someone who had trained them to see him as a friend. Not so different from what he'd done to Will, if you thought about it.

Hannibal stepped through the front door and shut it securely behind himself. Each went still, regarding one another, two wolves standing over the same dead elk, perhaps, ready to face off for dominance.

You can train a bear to be a wolf and a wolf to be a bear. Train them long enough and they will hunt together.

"Will," Hannibal said, his voice soft but bright with pride, illuminated with joy. "You've slain the beast."

Will stalked across the short span of space toward him, glass crunching underfoot. Hannibal's eyes were alight, eager, glimmering – though as Will neared, they narrowed slightly, just the slightest indication of Hannibal putting up his guard. Will was unpredictable, after all.

He raised his bloody hand and touched Hannibal's bottom lip, drawing his fingertips across it, leaving a smear of red. Hannibal's tongue crept out and tasted it, undeniably pleased. Will reached out again and Hannibal took him by the wrist, guiding his fingers back toward his mouth. Taking the first two, he pressed them against his tongue and sucked them clean.

Will felt every single undulation of that powerful, wet muscle, and it was a veritable torture in his heightened state. He pulled free and caught Hannibal by the chin, spreading blood and saliva on his cheek and neck. "You've urbanized your animal," he growled through half-clenched teeth. "Adapting it for bigger prey."

"Very successfully, it seems."

Will grabbed Hannibal's wool coat lapel with his free hand and constricted his other, squeezing Hannibal's jaw hard enough to elicit a soft intake of breath that made his mouth breachable. Will crushed in on it with his own, tasting Hannibal, paired with the bestial iron of Randall Tier's blood. He braced himself and pushed, catching Hannibal back on his heels, shoving him roughly into the closed door, hard enough to rattle his fishing gear on its rack on the wall. "Man is the only animal that kills just to kill," he said as he ripped at Hannibal's overcoat, pulling it from his shoulders and using it to pin his arms against his sides before kissing him again, even harder than before, until he tasted fresh blood from a split near the corner of Hannibal's mouth.

"Man is an animal," Hannibal panted, struggling against the coat. His hands could reach Will's waist, and they dug into the flesh beneath his ribs. "He can have both calculated murder and instinct, if he chooses." Hannibal's grip was merciless and Will was forced to try and edge away. Hannibal took the opportunity to drop the coat entirely in a smooth motion, freeing himself. Will came at him again but Hannibal was ready, absorbing the impact of his body and twisting to pin Will to the door instead, the knob jabbing into his hip.

Will just laughed. As with every sensation since he'd snapped Randall Tier's neck, pain felt pure and wholly alive, only sharpening the world and bringing him more deeply into the present moment. He relaxed his body and let Hannibal force him against the door, a knee between his legs, stripping off Will's old brown coat and then his own suit jacket in a series of desperate tugs. A hand against him now, gauging his response, which was throbbing and immediate.

Will waited until Hannibal shoved his tongue in his mouth before arching his back, bracing it against the door and tossing them both to the floor with a meaty thud. Hannibal reached up to grab at his hair but Will caught his wrists and forced them back down to the hardwood floor not far from Baxter's blood-dotted dog bed. The sight of it barely registered with Will – he was too intent on keeping his thighs tight against Hannibal's to restrict his movements. Hannibal smiled benevolently up at him, close-lipped but delighted. "You feel it, don't you – the kill–"

And very suddenly, he was on his back with Hannibal on top of him, pinning him down with a forearm across Will's throat, legs locked around his. He craned his neck down and pressed his tongue into Will's cheek, drawing it back toward his ear, likely to taste the blood spatter. The same look came over his features as did when he took a bite of something particularly delightful, usually something he'd cooked himself.

Will managed to slither free – whether it was his skill or Hannibal let him do so, he wasn't sure. Once on top again, he snared Hannibal's tie and constricted it to keep him in line, then ripped up his shirt out of his waistband and yanked on the belt buckle. Hannibal took the opportunity while he was distracted with the task to wind his ankles around Will's and suddenly bring them together, destabilizing him. Hannibal on top of him again, breathing heavily as he ripped Will's shirt open, scattering buttons amidst the broken glass and running his tongue up from Will's navel to his nipple before edging it with his teeth.

Will arched his back again with a sudden gasp. Hannibal paused to tear off his tie and then resumed the treatment on the other side, biting harder this time as his hand traveled down to

cup around Will's outline.

That put him enough off balance that Will could brace his hip and flip them again, knowing they were getting closer and closer to the spread of broken glass and Randall's lifeless body. It only fuelled the incinerating pulse of blood through his body, lighting up every nerve to the point where every touch, every stimulation was overwhelming. Flexing his thighs again, he reared up to pull the mostly-buttonless shirt the rest of the way off. Hannibal clamped onto his thighs with his hands and shifted beneath him, just enough so Will could feel the swell of his desire pressed against his own, meeting its match. Hannibal moved beneath him, thrusting up against Will with a precise movement that made him shake and stutter out a wordless noise.

Bolts of desire struck him everywhere – he felt like the Wound Man or Abel Gideon's poor nurse. He reciprocated instinctively, thrusting back, grinding himself against it. He crumpled at the waist and draped himself over Hannibal, kissing him fiercely again, a hand snarled in his hair, holding his head against the floor. His other he raked through Hannibal's chest hair, tugging at it none too gently, which elicited a pleasing sound from Hannibal's throat that Will ate through the kiss. Hannibal's response was to rut against him as he could while trying to open Will's pants one handed.

In a few tangled moments they were free of more clothing, having rolled back on top of Hannibal's woolen coat, the satin lining cool and comforting against Will's burning skin. Hannibal's hands were cool as well, chilled still from the winter landscape, heaven on Will's flushed and sweaty body. They managed the rest of their clothing clumsily, helping one another with frenzied fingers. And then it was skin on skin on skin, and Will was lost in Hannibal's scent, the sweet-salt taste of his body. Little sharp pains now as Hannibal nipped up the side of his throat, then ran his tongue down the edge of Will's jawline. Will pitched beneath him as Hannibal's cool hand found its way to him, curling his fingers into involuntary claws that he pressed into Hannibal's shoulders, leaving reddened weals behind.

Will managed to get on top again, and while Hannibal's mouth was occupied with his, he reached out and plucked up a piece of broken window glass. Hannibal tried to shift to see what he was doing but Will bit his lip to prevent him from turning his head. Hannibal's eyes were alight but he put a hand around Will's wrist. However, he didn't stop Will from bringing the shard of glass closer to his own face, just rested his fingers in case he should need to disarm Will at a moment's notice.

Will half-smiled down at him, a look of playful triumph. He pressed the glass against Hannibal's neck, just under his jawline.

Here's the reckoning I promised you, he thought about saying. Within parts of a second, his mind waged a debate with his heart and his instincts. Killing Randall Tier had felt better than anything he'd ever experienced in his entire life. Killing Hannibal Lecter would feel better than that, even more powerful.

He guided the edge of the glass into Hannibal's skin. It dimpled and gave way, beading up with blood. Will pulled the glass away and Hannibal released his wrist so he could toss it aside. He brought his mouth to the wound. Just a little taste – the cut was so small it could easily be written off as a shaving mishap.

Hannibal moaned with a sudden unselfconscious ecstasy as Will's tongue played with the wound and his lips applied the tiniest bit of suction. He pressed up into Will desperately, grinding against the inside of his thigh. "You," Will said conversationally after he'd released Hannibal's throat, "taste sweeter than Randall Tier."

"Your palate grows more refined by the day," Hannibal complimented through labored breaths. He wound his hand behind Will's head and demanded his kiss, adding the taste of his mouth to the taste of his blood. "There's something of yours I'd like to get a taste of."

"What's that?" Will asked.

Hannibal's response was to squeeze a hand between them and grope him very deliberately, fingers roaming further and further back, then forward again. "I'm over the moon, Will. You didn't hide behind the gun. I would have heard the shot."

"So you want to, ah, reward good behavior, then?" In contrast to Hannibal's suggestion, Will slid lower on his body and parted Hannibal's legs, sliding his tongue along the soft inner skin of his thigh.

"Always," Hannibal sighed, throwing his head back and curling his fingers in Will's hair as Will drew him in for a few tantalizing moments.

Without warning, Will let Hannibal go and put his mouth against the inner thigh, nearly to the groin, and bit down. Hannibal's sudden outburst mellowed into a sound of pleasure as he sucked, leaving a deep, mottled bruise with clear teeth marks in the middle.

"Will," Hannibal pleaded.

"You wanted me to be intimate with my instincts, Dr. Lecter. My instinct was to bite you." He kissed the spot and swallowed Hannibal again, running a hand up his chest. Hannibal caught it and held it over his heart in a steely grip, the other playing with Will's hair, as usual.

Will paused and let Hannibal slip out of his mouth, just to say, "Let's see you explain *that* to Alana Bloom."

Hannibal dared to let out a quiet but disbelieving laugh. "I didn't know you knew."

Will replaced his mouth with his hand to say, "I'm an investigator – what did you think would happen? If you didn't want me to know, you wouldn't have left her hair on your pillow."

"It's not a secret." The last word was distorted as Hannibal quivered under his treatment, close now. "Tell me, Will – how does it make you feel? Does it upset you?"

Will scoffed. "After what I just did? What we just did?" He jerked his head toward Randall Tier. "You're using her as an insurance policy. At first, it was, ah, to keep me in line. Now she's a-a *character* reference." He stuck his face back against Hannibal's thigh and threatened the flesh on the other side with his teeth, though he didn't bite down. Hannibal

tensed in his grip and was seconds away from spilling, so Will showed him no mercy, ceasing his movement entirely.

“You’re still jealous,” Hannibal accused him.

Will shrugged, massaging the tip. “More like I want her far away from… this.” That was true. But of course he was furious, thinking about Alana curled up on *his* side of the bed, and how easy it was for them, their relationship at least somewhat public. Acceptable if unorthodox. They could walk hand in hand down the street.

Hannibal exhaled and arched his back as Will fingered the slit. “Alana’s always been your champion. Always wanted to protect you. Naturally, you’d like to return the favor.”

“Now she’s *your* champion. You’re just using her. You should break it off.” Will said it, then resumed his work, which prevented further comment.

“For Alana’s sake, or yours?” Hannibal managed through his heavy breaths, his hand tightening on Will’s hair.

“Right now, for yours.” Will abandoned him again and Hannibal let out an uninhibited growl of frustration.

“There’s no reason to end it,” Hannibal countered. “If I did, it could throw unnecessary attention at us.”

“It’d be obvious,” Will said softly, probling with a finger, which made Hannibal give a sharp intake of breath. “That you left her for me?”

“Too obvious, I should think.”

“Makes… sense.” Will’s finger brushed over something raised and it made Hannibal shudder, the hand in Will’s hair twisting involuntarily.

“You have the Old Testament in you, Will,” he sighed. “I’m sure you’ll add my dalliance with Alana to the bill you expect me to pay, an eye for an eye.”

“I’ll put it on your tab.” Will descended with his mouth again, still exploring blindly with an uneducated finger. It was seconds before Hannibal came with a sound of pure gratitude. While he was still recovering, Will repositioned himself and thrust against the divot where Hannibal’s thigh met the edge of his belly, gazing down at his closed eyes, lashes resting on his cheeks, the parted lips and labored breaths. He devoured Hannibal’s response to the pleasure he’d gifted to him and used it to fuel his own. That pleasure peaked and he felt its reach broadened by the hedonistic power he experienced in the wake of Randall’s murder, futher enhanced by the sin of pride – Hannibal’s for him, and Will’s in himself, his ability to give Hannibal what he wanted in every way now.

He collapsed forward, head resting over Hannibal’s heart. Hannibal’s arms closed around him, hands moving in appreciative, possessive caresses up and down the expanse of his back, lingering over the rise of his ass, cupping the back of his head and playing with his hair as

they breathed in the moon-washed dark. Just over the scents created by sweat and sex, Will got a faint whiff or something *off*. He realized it was Randall's body, which he'd almost forgotten about.

Will pushed himself reluctantly up on his hands and knees, hovering over Hannibal's splayed-out form, perfectly disheveled. He arched in and pressed a kiss against Hannibal's mouth before rocking back on his heels. "Go home," he ordered. "I'll meet you there after I take care of things here."

"I'll need to make a stop to secure an alibi," Hannibal said, satisfied weariness dripping from his voice as he sat up and snagged his underwear from where it had come to rest on the floor nearby. Will found his own on the back of a chair and stood to step into them.

"Whatever you need to do." Will pulled on his pants and buckled them, then handed Hannibal his shirt after he did the same.

Once again civilized by dress, Will felt the frenzy of power leaving him, the zest ebbing. He was going dangerously numb, everything collapsing within him from the inside, a black hole opening in his chest.

Kissing Hannibal helped, so he indulged himself for several delectable moments.

At last, they parted.

"I'll see you at home," Hannibal said, and closed the door behind himself.

...and CUT!

Will cleans up his house and hangs Randall's murder suit in his garage (later spotted by Freddie Lounds). He brings Randall's body to Hannibal's house as an offering. Hannibal treats the wounds on his hands and it's all very cute. He tells Will not to "go inside" or disassociate what he's done. Presumably, Will butchers Randall and saves some of his meat, and then displays the rest at the Natural History Museum so he and Hannibal can flirt as they "analyze the unknown killer" the next day.

... stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 10: Naka-Choko

Chapter Summary

Alana, Will, and Hannibal have dinner together. Things are, shall we say, tense... Will waits for Alana to leave, so he can show Hannibal he can do things Alana can't.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “We Are Who We Are” – MISSIO

“It's not unusual to feel a little different
When sometimes different leaves the legacy
It's not unusual to feel a little useless
When sometimes uselessness unlocks what you're looking for…
It's not unusual to feel a little lonely
But sometimes loneliness can lead to better things
It's not unusual to feel a little guilty
When sometimes guiltiness can you show you a little more
Why do we try to live a lie
It isn't worth it
Who you trying to please
'Cause if it's me it isn't working
We are who we are
That can be hard to accept
We are who we are
There's no reason to regret
We are who we are
Life can be a punch to the chest
We are who we are
That can be hard to accept
You don't need to worry about a thing
We are all fucked up human beings
You don't need to worry about a thing
We are all fucked up human beings…”

This “cut unscene” immediately follows the suckling pig scene where Will, Alana, and Hannibal have dinner. Things get, shall we say, awkward, as Alana accuses Will and Hannibal of having no boundaries with one another. “Just hard to know where the two of you are with each other.” Will says, “We know where we are with each other. Shouldn’t that be enough?” to which Hannibal adds, “Better the devil you know.”

Dessert had been… tense, to say the least. It had nothing to do with the delectable caramel flan Hannibal had served, and everything to do with Alana staring azure daggers at each of them in turn as they talked of mundane things like ice fishing and the Baltimore Arts Council's upcoming opera showcase. At last, Hannibal and Will had finished theirs, though Alana barely tasted her custard. Hannibal stood, perhaps to offer a *digestiv* , but Alana spoke abruptly. "Make sure you drive safe, Will. There's probably black ice on the roads after the melt yesterday."

Hannibal glanced his way, eyebrows raised, an open, deceptively innocuous expression. *Now what will you do?*

"I'll take that under advisement," he said with a wry little smile. "But, ah, the ice'll still be there whether I leave now or after I… lend a hand."

"Thank you, Will," Hannibal said as Will gathered some plates to bring back to the kitchen. Alana exhaled and stood, announcing her displeasure with the sound of that little sigh. She took up some glasses and stubbornly followed Will to the kitchen. Hannibal wheeled the remains of the pig in behind them.

The kitchen was thick with frustrated tension as Will and Alana washed and dried the dishes and Hannibal put up the pig, distributing sections to his refrigerators and freezers. "The carcass will make a lovely broth," Hannibal noted blandly. "The bones can be used to make aspic. Will, you should take some with you. Boil off the remaining meat for the dogs."

"Never thought about cooking for them before," Will said with a smile as he wiped a plate dry and replaced it in the cabinet. "I suppose they deserve the same kind of… papering you give us." He glanced over at Alana, who was drying a wine glass with stiff, angry fingers. If she wasn't careful, she'd shatter it in her own hand.

"Cooking for others has numerous psychological benefits." Hannibal brought his serving tools to the sink. "It gives one a sense of altruistic fulfillment. Provides a nurturing connection."

"Cooking together can be intimate." Will gently sponged the delicate dessert plates. Behind him, he heard Alana snap a knife into the knife block with an aggressive sound. "Don't you think?" he asked Hannibal directly as Hannibal sidled up to him at the sink. They were standing very, very close together now, washing in tandem, arms and hips and shoulders in serious danger of coming into contact with one another. Will could feel Alana boring holes into him with her eyes.

Amid the triumph he felt in response to her displeasure, there was an undercurrent of longing. *You should be thanking me, Alana. One less night you'll spend in the arms of a murderer. One night you'll be safe. One day you'll understand how I tried to protect you.*

"Certainly," Hannibal agreed, stepping away only to snag a dish towel to dry his hands, then standing next to Will at the sink again, just as closely. "It's undeniably a bonding ritual." He

gathered up the dry dessert dishes and moved behind Will to put them in the cabinet. As he slid by, he gently rested his free hand on the small of Will's back.

A simple gesture. Could easily be misconstrued as letting Will know he was passing behind him with glassware, just to announce where he was in space so Will wouldn't back up suddenly from the sink. But the hand lingered far too long not to send a message that might as well have been on a neon sign.

"Are there psychological benefits to cleaning up after?" Alana stood behind them at the island, her arms crossed over her chest, giving her hair a flippant toss.

"All domestic actions, when shared, create a sense of community bonding," Hannibal told her as he untied his apron and dropped it in a laundry basket, a woven thing that looked more like a piece of artwork or an archeological artifact than a place to toss your dirty linens.

At last, Will could delay no more. Alana sat sullenly on the living room sofa as Hannibal walked Will to the door. "Thank you for dinner," Will said, dropping his gaze and then lifting it to meet Hannibal's again with a deliberate sweep of his lashes.

"Goodnight."

Will adjusted his scarf and walked down the stairs toward where he'd parked his car. He looked back and saw Hannibal giving him a lingering glance before he shut the door.

Will moved the Volvo further down the street, but where he still had line of sight to the front door of Hannibal's house. He turned on the radio and flipped stations until he found some Hannibal-approved classical. Over time, though, its patient delicacy irritated him, so he surfed the stations again until he picked up some Creedence Clearwater Revival. They sang to him about a bad moon rising.

"The voice of rage and ruin," Will mused as he settled into the seat to wait.

Less than an hour passed before Alana Bloom marched out of Hannibal's house with her coat on. The expression on her face twisted in Will's mind, separating. Part of him was more than happy that she wasn't. Another part ached for her, and chastised himself for causing her pain.

It's for her own good, he told himself. *She needs to be far away from this, or she might end up as collateral damage.*

Margot Verger too.

Will felt a deep twinge of remorse. That night had been a mistake, a grave one, in possibly the literal sense. The last thing he and Jack needed for their plan was another pawn to move around the board. Another person to worry about. Will had put her in danger by sleeping with her, even if she'd obviously come with an agenda that he still didn't fully understand, beyond two broken people looking for some comfort in one another.

He understood that desire very, very well, and it had proven impossible to deny Margot that comfort. Even if she'd left as soon as he'd fallen asleep.

Alana got into her car and drove away, tires giving a little bitchy screech as she pulled out.

Will waited until her tail lights disappeared before getting out of the car and walking back up to the house. The door was unlocked. Soft Chopin lilted through the shadows of the foyer, and Will followed it to the living room, where Hannibal was opening a bottle of wine at the sideboard.

“Will,” Hannibal greeted, setting down the bottle to let it breathe. “Did you forget something?”

“Yeah, I think I did.” Will dropped his coat on the back of the sofa and approached Hannibal with deliberate steps, the winter’s chill seeping off of him as he passed the crackling fireplace, the rest of it melting away as his blood grew hotter. A small movement, and Hannibal’s backside was against the edge of the sideboard, Will’s hands circling his hips, fingers lingering on the silky fabric of the back of his vest. He leaned in and Hannibal put a hand on the side of his face. The kiss was innocent enough, brief, but Will felt it sear through him, burning the kindling left in the wake of Alana’s displeasure.

Hannibal pulled away and turned to the wine again. Will released him and moved back, and Hannibal poured them each a glass of red. They retired to the sofa, sitting close in the middle, knees touching, Hannibal’s arm stretched out behind Will’s neck. “I guess Alana couldn’t stay?” Will asked, arching an eyebrow as Hannibal dipped his nose beyond the rim of the glass to inhale the bouquet.

“I told her I had a headache.” Hannibal swirled the wine and watched it cling to the side of the glass.

Will laughed. It rang through the shadowy halls of the house. “You know what’s good for that?”

Hannibal smiled, and bent his elbow to touch the back of Will’s neck, fingertips brushing the tendons that held his skull to his spine. “A home remedy, I’m sure.” They each took a sip of wine, and watched each other’s throat muscles move as they swallowed. “Tell me, Will,” Hannibal said, “are you jealous of Alana?”

“I’m not the jealous type,” Will replied, resting the base of his glass against his leg. “That’s you. When you considered for even a second that I touched Matthew Brown, or, ah, let him touch *me* , you lost your damn mind.”

“You frequently impair my judgment, Will.” The hand behind his head teased up into the hair at the top of his neck. “But I would argue you’re just as prone to jealousy. You were jealous of Randall Tier. Perhaps you still are.”

Will scoffed.

“You said as much at the crime scene,” Hannibal reminded him. “You said Randall Tier came into his own much easier than whoever killed him, and this ease gives you a sense of inadequacy.”

“Well, nobody likes to be called a *fledgling* anything,” Will retorted with a snarky curve of his mouth.

“It took Michaelangelo five years to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling,” Hannibal told him after another drink of wine. “Enduring creations take time.”

“Rome, ah, wasn’t built in a day?” Will rested his free hand on Hannibal’s thigh, drawing his fingertips around its muscled curve, something so solid and primal trapped beneath exquisitely crafted cloth.

Hannibal looked at his hand, smiled, then back up at Will. “Randall Tier found himself, and through this discovery, found his greatness. But he had limits he would never overcome. He wanted to become an animal that kills indiscriminately, hunting on instinct, not insight. You, on the other hand, have the potential to become something much more intricate. Achieve not just greatness, but magnificence.”

“Once I, ah, come out of my chrysalis entirely?” Will slid his fingers further up Hannibal’s inseam, but left a finger’s breadth of space before reaching the center.

“Your wings are exquisite, Will – fearfully and wonderfully made.” The hand on the back of his neck came forward and Hannibal brushed his fingertips oh so lightly along Will’s hairline, drawing back the front curl before winding behind his ear. “I’m pleased we know where we are with each other.”

“Even if nobody else does. Especially Alana.”

Hannibal cupped the side of his face for a brief moment of pure affection, then traced his knuckles down to send them on a journey along the slope of Will’s neck. “My beautiful paradox.”

“Better the devil you know,” Will said with soft playfulness after pausing for another drink. “You meant in the, ah, Biblical sense, I take it?”

“Mmm.” Hannibal’s thumb paused over Will’s vein, taking his pulse.

“Though you’ve known us both that way,” Will muttered, unable to stop the bitter twist of the words.

“But you’re not the jealous type.”

“Of course not.” Will got up, pulling free of Hannibal, who let him go. “Why would I be jealous of someone you’re clearly using for your own ends?” He exhaled, bristling, then took a drink of wine to try and swallow it back.

“You tell me,” Hannibal said evenly.

“Oh, I don’t know.” Will glanced up at the antelope, resting his elbow on the fireplace mantle. “I suppose it’s just a little unorthodox because of the age difference. And the past power differential – she was your student at one time.”

“She can’t be much younger than you,” Hannibal noted, watching Will pace.

“Either way, it’s a lot easier for people to, uh, *digest* than… you and me.”

Hannibal paused, studying him. Will could feel his gaze, though he looked at the fire instead. “Your jealousy lies,” he said slowly, choosing his words with clear deliberation, “in the fact that Alana and I can openly present ourselves as a couple.” He paused. “We haven’t, Will. It’s been very private.”

“Didn’t you take her to some Baltimore Arts Council thing a couple of weeks ago?”

A brief smile passed over Hannibal’s face. “Keeping tabs again?”

“Something else to add to your bill when it’s time to pay.” Will retrieved a piece of split wood from the basket next to the hearth and tossed it on the fire. He sighed. “It’s not important. I know it’s not the same as what we have. It can’t be.”

“You’re right, it isn’t. And discretion is—”

“I know,” Will interrupted curtly. Hannibal waited patiently for him to speak again, drawing wine from his glass. “Do you think she knows? About us, I mean? I sensed, um, some… deeper animosity than just, uh, a scolding about doctor-patient boundaries.”

“I have no doubt she harbors suspicions.” Hannibal gave an indifferent shrug. He stood and faced Will at the mantle, the undulating shadows of the fire playing on the side of his face, illuminating his right eye at the periphery. “Someone left a very prominent mark on me that, despite my efforts, she spotted.”

Will smiled, a hint of teeth, a deep satisfaction settling through him. “That must have been… an interesting exchange.”

“She said nothing,” Hannibal told him. “But I knew she knew what it was.”

“So maybe she doesn’t suspect us of murder,” Will reasoned, edging closer to Hannibal. “Just fucking.”

“You and that mouth,” Hannibal scolded gently, closing the distance further. Will reached out to take Hannibal’s tie between his fingers and slide it between them, testing the silk.

“An interesting red herring.”

“You’re the fisherman, Will.” Hannibal let Will loosen his tie and unfasten the top button of his shirt, tracing his fingers to the hollow spot where the clavicles met. “Do you still have feelings for Alana?”

“You managed to drive an irredeemable wedge between us,” Will told him, fingering the cloth of Hannibal’s shirt collar. “Congratulations.”

“Are congratulations in order?” Hannibal stepped back and picked up the almost-empty wine glasses. “In that case, I have a better bottle to open.”

Will followed him into the kitchen and rinsed the glasses as Hannibal retrieved another bottle from the pantry, blowing off the dust. As he opened the corkscrew, Will said, “Why do you let them gather dust? The rest of your house is… spotless.”

“It helps me remember how old each bottle is and how long I’ve had it,” Hannibal answered, popping the cork. “I have a personal superstition that if you dust your wine bottles, they’ll be corked.”

“Huh.” Will half-smiled, leaning against the counter next to the sink.

Hannibal poured them each a glass and handed one to Will, who accepted it, nosed it, and took a drink.

“What do you taste?” Hannibal asked after checking the bouquet and legs.

“Oak, but it’s very faint. I want to say cherry. And the clean dirt. There’s pepper at the finish.”

Hannibal put the wine to his own lips and tasted for himself. “Very good,” he complimented. “You’re progressing nicely.”

“Well, I have a good teacher.” Will took off his jacket and left it on the island, rolling up his sleeves before hoisting himself onto the kitchen counter to sit, an open dare to Hannibal’s sensibilities. “So did Alana, apparently.”

“How do you know?” Hannibal’s voice was even, but Will could nearly feel his blood rising to the occasion as he deliberately provoked Hannibal in a way he’d mastered over their months together.

“Tonight when you asked her what she tasted with the wine… she knows all of the flavors, and the names of everything — and she can tell when it’s more than one type of grape.” Will took another pull from his glass.

“She has a very talented tongue.” Hannibal’s own stole out from between his lips to moisten the lower one, just the tiniest touch.

“I know. I had the pleasure, at least *once* ,” Will said.

“Would you want it again?” Hannibal asked, taking a menacing step forward. He was within touching distance now, but kept his hands to himself, his muscles coiling beneath the clothing that Will longed to free him of.

“The first time I met her I could barely say anything. Because she was too pretty.” Will watched Hannibal as he put his glass down and pressed closer, hands on the edge of the counter on either side of Will’s thighs. “I like her hair. A lot of long hair is nice sometimes, the way it feels on your skin.”

“Indeed.” Hannibal’s hands rested gently on Will’s knees, caressing a moment before attempting to draw them apart.

Will resisted him, with an infuriating smile on his face. “Back to mark your territory again? I’m not a piece of land you can drive a stake into and call your own. Well,” he laughed, “I mean, you could drive something in.”

“You’re adept at marking territory as well,” Hannibal reminded him. “And, if you ask nicely, I wouldn’t mind being staked.”

His muscles quivered with the exertion of pushing against Hannibal’s hands. Hannibal squeezed tighter, likely leaving marks behind. Will relented and put his arms around Hannibal’s neck, but didn’t kiss him yet even as he pressed closer, Will’s legs on either side of his midsection now. Without warning, Hannibal picked him up and deposited him on the kitchen floor.

“You know, Will,” Hannibal told him conspiratorially as he climbed up on top, boxing him in, shoving a leg between his to keep his knees open. Will put his hands on Hannibal's shoulders and tried to keep him at bay as he bent over, his breath sliding along Will’s throat. “There are many things you can do that Alana Bloom can’t.”

Will's arms shook with the effort of keeping Hannibal away from his neck. “Shit,” he muttered as Hannibal plucked one hand from his own shoulder by the wrist and forced it back against the kitchen floor’s smooth, cool surface. “It always surprises me — every time — how fucking strong you are—”

“Not like our lovely, soft Alana, not at all,” Hannibal whispered. “But I think you prefer this.”

“You got me figured out,” Will admitted through halting breaths as he continued to push against Hannibal’s hold, which now circled both wrists.

“Stop fighting.”

Will exhaled and relaxed his muscles. When Hannibal let him go, he stayed where he was. Hannibal dismounted him briefly and retrieved the wine bottle. He lifted it directly to his lips for a slow drink before kneeling, sitting on Will’s hips and bringing the bottle to his mouth. Will inclined his head upward and took a few swallows, a stream of purple sliding from the corner of his mouth. Hannibal slowly descended on it and licked it away.

“That pairs well with you,” he said, breath caressing over Will’s parted lips.

“Let’s see if it pairs with you,” Will challenged, arching his neck up to try and catch a kiss. Hannibal backed off and out of his reach. Will made a soft growl of frustration, closing his grip around Hannibal’s thighs. “I bet you don’t, ah… tease *her* like that.”

“Instead of speculating on what I would or wouldn’t do to Doctor Bloom, you might learn to ask for what you want,” Hannibal reasoned as he unfastened the buttons on Will’s shirt slowly, tracing the newly exposed skin with his fingertips bit by bit as it was revealed to him. He smiled with a hungry light in his eyes as if he relished the way his continual touch resulted in Will’s breath changing, the anticipatory quiver of flesh at each uncovered inch.

“Then let me taste it. Taste you,” Will demanded, straining up against Hannibal’s weight.

“Very well. Let’s see how well I’ve trained your tongue.” Hannibal let him drink from the bottle again, then eased their lips together, pulling back a few inches when Will’s kiss became too insistent. “Gently now. Take your time.” Will’s body was responding, his breath the cadence of desire, nipples arduously erect. Hannibal gave him more wine, kissed him again, let Will’s tongue probe his a moment before he bit the corner of his mouth in a sudden sting that made Will utter a muffled sound of surprise. Blood and wine, ah, there was the heavenly pairing.

Hannibal broke their kiss and tipped the wine bottle just enough to dribble a stream of purple red from Will’s neck to his navel, then descended after the droplets, chasing them with his mouth. Will exhaled a long breath, then took several shallow, begging ones, his eyes closed to savor the sensation, without the distraction of his sense of sight.

“I meant what I said before,” Hannibal whispered against the warm, damp skin of his clavicle as Will gripped his back.

“Yeah?” Will managed, his voice strained. “You’d let me? You… want me to? I remember you told me once… you’re very careful what you put in your body.”

“If you’d like. But the tasting hasn’t ended.” Hannibal settled his mouth against Will’s neck, drinking the little reservoir of wine that had caught in the hollow of his throat before delivering a stinging bite just below it and slightly to the right. Will inhaled sharply, and a little moan escaped. Will could feel Hannibal grinding his outline against his own in a desperate attempt to elicit some attention there, and Will suffered his arousal instead of enjoying it; the torture of his unreleased frustration made Hannibal’s own body respond in kind.

“I want to,” Will breathed, air hitching in his lungs. Hannibal leaned over, palms on the floor, one by his head, the other next to his shoulder.

“How long have you wanted this?” Hannibal asked, voice casual velvet. “You never said. Have I made you feel you couldn’t ask?”

“No,” Will said, and it was the truth. “I like… the way we’ve done it.”

“Variety is the spice of life.” Hannibal got to his feet and held out his hand to Will. Will took it and stood, his grip shaking in Hannibal’s cool, steady fingers. “Have you done it before?”

“Uh, no,” Will admitted as Hannibal refilled their wine glasses and handed his back to him before heading for the stairs.

The bedroom still had the sense of invasion. Will’s nose was nowhere near as sensitive as Hannibal’s, but he swore he could smell Alana’s perfume in the air. Hannibal hadn’t cared that he’d found out about Alana. Otherwise he wouldn’t have let her hair stay on his pillow knowing that Will would be spending the night. The man was meticulous enough to frame Will for multiple murders, much less never leave a shred of forensic evidence behind.

Initially, it'd felt like a slap in the face. Further punishment, probably, for the attempt on his life.

Well, he could leave his mark here, too. Because Hannibal was right – there were things he could do that Alana could not. As Hannibal took off his shoes and his watch, and emptied his pockets on the nightstand, Will pulled free of his wine-stained shirt and relieved himself of his own footwear. He crept up behind Hannibal and threaded his arms beneath his, leaning his chin on Hannibal's shoulder and undoing the buttons of his vest while Hannibal started at the neck and worked on the shirt. "Why do you always have so many fucking buttons and hooks and zippers," Will growled thorough a smile against the side of Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal chuckled at his insistence, undoing his belt and letting Will strip him before paying the favor in return. Ah, skin on skin at last, Hannibal's arms around him, fingers splayed in his hair and on the place where his back became his backside. After a few moments, Hannibal snuck his hand behind himself to the bedside drawer, and opened it to remove the bottle stashed there. This he pressed into Will's hand as he kissed him. "Don't be shy," he advised as Will looked at it with some disbelief that this was really happening. "Remember. No guilt, no fear."

"Are you… sure?" Will asked softly as Hannibal slid onto the bed and reclined on the pillows, beckoning Will to follow.

"I wouldn't have offered it if I wasn't," Hannibal replied. "Just do as I've taught you."

Will licked his bottom lip and nodded, climbing onto the bed. He knelt over Hannibal and kissed him, stroked him, then paused to lubricate everything, maybe a little too much. His finger massaged the entrance tentatively as Hannibal kissed his throat with tender, encouraging lips. Will pressed in hesitantly, and was relieved when Hannibal leaned forward a bit and gently took him by the wrist, directing him to the target.

When Will found the rise he was looking for, he worked against it, unsure of himself at first, watching Hannibal's responses closely, hawk-like. Hannibal let go of his wrist and fell back on the cushions, eyes closed, breathing heavily and giving him encouraging noises and soft words. Confidence flooded him as sweat broke out on Hannibal's brow and his carefully-styled hair fell over his forehead. He wrapped his hand around Hannibal's length and began to move in semi-coordination.

"Will," Hannibal sighed. "I want to–"

Whatever Hannibal had wanted to say or do, it didn't matter, the words lost in a sudden deep inhale and exhale, his body seizing. It was perfect, seeing him like this, the cool and collected Dr. Lecter, ever analytical and measured, always pressed and brushed and buttoned, having one of, if not the loudest and most uninhibited climaxes Will had ever witnessed. Not that he'd seen many, but it was a personal record for his interactions with Hannibal at the very least.

"That was beautiful," he found himself saying, raw, honest.

“It was,” Hannibal whispered through labored breaths, head still tilted back, eyes closed. After a few moments he sat up and kissed Will with appreciative desperation. “Very well done, Will. Always a quick study. Are *you* ready?”

Will nodded, his heart pulsing through his body, pulsing almost painfully through his arousal. He eased Hannibal onto his stomach, and Hannibal propped himself up on his knees and elbows, grabbing a pillow for extra support. Will positioned himself and applied some pressure to the opening with the head.

“You’re not going to hurt me,” Hannibal promised him, then sighed in satisfaction as Will took his advice and pressed harder.

“Oh God,” Will couldn’t stop himself from saying, an instinctive reaction more than an invocation. It took everything in his power not to thrust, not yet. He remembered how Hannibal had gone slowly, letting him get used to it before moving too much. Tight. Incredibly warm. The initial sensations were almost enough to make him lose it. He felt cradled inside of Hannibal, like he belonged there, not some foreign body but part of the same person.

Gingerly, he took Hannibal by the hip, resting the other hand on his back, and gave an exploratory thrust. “...fuck,” he managed, just above a whisper.

“Overwhelming?” Hannibal asked conversationally, turning his head so Will could see his profile.

“ *Yes* ,” Will admitted.

“Imagine how I felt the first time you… let me inside,” Hannibal said, words distorting in a half-moan as Will moved again.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes.”

Will allowed himself to increase his speed. Hannibal shifted beneath him as if realigning the trajectory and bowed his head in a kind of pleasured reverence, murmuring words in a language Will couldn’t understand. He peaked again with a heady sigh, back glistening with sweat that dampened his hair behind his ears and the back of his neck as well. He tensed around Will, who muttered a few choice words of his own.

Here was the incomparable Chesapeake Ripper, the Atlantic Coast’s most dangerous serial killer, completely bent to Will’s control, submitting to him, trembling because of what Will had done. Backing into Will’s thrusts now, because he wanted it, because it felt good. Because he wanted Will to have his pleasure, trusted him with it.

Bad idea, Will thought, reaching up to put one hand in Hannibal’s damp hair, tightening his grip on Hannibal’s hip. *You really shouldn’t trust me.*

The Chesapeake Ripper can’t be caught. You’re going to have to kill him.

Will shook his head, scattering his own sweat, trying to drive the intrusive thoughts away.

"Will."

All Hannibal had to do was say his name and Will was done for. He collapsed on Hannibal's back, clawing at him for support, panting like he'd just sprinted a mile. He left himself draped over Hannibal, still inside, the remnants of his orgasm slowly fading away, ripples evening out. At last, he slid off and crumpled where he fell, too tired to even roll onto his back. He felt Hannibal gather him into his arms, a tangle of limbs and sweat and fluids. Hannibal cradled him close, running a hand through his hair, cheek pressed against the side of his head. "Well done, Will," he breathed against Will's curls.

Will let out an exhausted chuckle and snuggled closer. In the post-climax clarity, his mind took him back to the night he'd spent with Margot Verger. It had been… so utterly different than what he'd just experienced.

Not that there was a complete lack of feeling – he felt connected to her through their obvious shared experiences. Hannibal had encouraged both of them to kill people, and it was evident, seeing each other naked, that they'd both endured serious bodily trauma. That night, he'd felt drawn to her, felt some affection, and when she'd made her move he had no real reason to resist.

She could become a friend, Will thought, someone who might have a chance to have a limited understanding of his life, but now was not the time. He had to keep his focus on Hannibal for his plan with Jack to work.

Don't lie to yourself, his brain whispered, tickling in the back of his skull. *A part of you wanted to get even with Hannibal for Alana.*

But all of that, all of it – Hannibal sleeping with Alana, him sleeping with Margot and keeping it a secret from Hannibal, hell, even his plan with Jack – it was all gray and pale and lifeless compared to what he'd just felt, to what he'd just done. What they'd done together. Will almost felt like he'd felt killing Randall Tier.

Was it cheating if they'd never set a boundary? Was it cheating if Hannibal was sleeping with Alana?

Was it really cheating if the only way he could finish with Margot was to think of Hannibal?

… and CUT!

Now, start the episode again. Urged on by Alana's description of Freddie Lounds's suspicions, Hannibal shows up to wait for her in her hotel room, wearing his murder suit! But she doesn't come home. That's because she's gone out to interview Will. When Will

doesn't answer the door, she starts snooping around and finds Randall Tier's suit. Will says he can explain… and Jack gets a voicemail that's just Freddie screaming…

… stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 11: Kō No Mono

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will feast on the debauched delicacy of drowned ortolans. After dinner, Hannibal has a surprise for Will -- opera tickets. Will's out of his element around Hannibal's fancy Arts Council friends. After a stop at a watering hole from their past, it's back to Hannibal's. They leave the lights on, 'cuz they don't hide from God!

Chapter Notes

Companion Songs: “Arsonist's Lullabye” by Hozier and “Liebestod” from the opera Tristan and Isolde.

“All you have is your fire
And the place you need to reach
Don't you ever tame your demons
But always keep 'em on a leash
When I was a man I thought it ended
When I knew love's perfect ache
But my peace has always depended
On all the ashes in my wake…”

This scene happens directly after the dinner between Will and Hannibal where they, ahm, very sexily, eat the ortolans. Hannibal says, “Yes. You must understand that blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance. Just as a source of light is burning.”

Hannibal’s dessert of honeyed figs was delicious, as Will knew it would be, but after the debauchery of the little birds, the taste of cruelty and sin and excess, the final course was pale in comparison. Hannibal acknowledged it himself. “Though it’s a breach of protocol, I should have served the ortolans last, don’t you think?”

“Maybe.” Will helped him carry a few things back to the kitchen. “I, ah, can think of another course we could have.”

“I thought the same.” Hannibal smiled at him in his periphery as he stacked plates next to the sink and arranged the washing neatly before abandoning it. He dipped his finger in the last remnants of honey fig sauce and came close to Will, pressing it against his lips. Will

murmured a small, pleasured sound, taking Hannibal's hand and holding it still so he could draw his finger in further before slowly letting it out.

"Come upstairs," Hannibal suggested, and Will nodded, nerves already fiery in anticipation, the blaze in him fed by the memory of Hannibal watching him put the entire songbird in his mouth before doing the same, the crunching of the bones, the delicious depravity of it all. Ending life just to end it, to have something delectable, if only for a few moments, purely for the capricious pleasure.

Hannibal settled into one of the chairs by the fireplace and crossed his legs, resting his folded hands against his knee. "Take your clothes off, Will."

"Don't have to tell me twice." The tension had been building for hours and God, something about those fucking birds–

Will stepped out of his shoes and stripped off his charcoal blazer, tossing it over the back of the other chair. Keeping easy eye contact with Hannibal, he half-smiled, a coy expression, and unbuttoned his cuffs, then his shirt, slowly, watching Hannibal watch him. He drew it carefully from his shoulders, stripped his arms free and tossed it on top of the jacket. Unbuckling his belt, he stepped out of his trousers and added them to the pile, then hooked his thumbs in the waistband of his underwear.

"That's far enough." Hannibal's eyes glimmered in appreciation as they climbed over Will from toes to eyes and back again.

"I'm thinking you should take these off," Will said, reaching down and brushing his hand over himself, just for a moment, then gesturing to the underwear. "With your teeth."

Hannibal stood and closed the distance. Will rested his hands on Hannibal's shoulders, daring to twist the fine tan and red-striped fabric in his grip, leaning in for a kiss. Hannibal gave it to him as he slid a hand from Will's navel to his clavicle, but it was brief, and he pulled away. Will turned, furrowing his brow, as Hannibal crossed the room to the closet. Hanging on the back of the door were two tuxedos with pristine white shirts, complete with black bow ties.

Hannibal turned to the interior of his closet and went to the tie rack, carefully removing the one he was wearing and hanging it in its place before sliding off his jacket and shoes. "Get dressed," he said, nodding toward the tuxes.

Will just stared at him, brain trying to comprehend what was happening. For a second, he had an otherworldly feeling like what he was seeing might not really be there, a remnant left over from his days of constant dreams and hallucinations.

"W-why am I, ah… putting this on?" Will crossed to the hanging tuxedos and examined them. They weren't identical – one was actually a deep blue-black with black accents, and a slimmer cut, while the other was more traditional. "What– why are we…"

"While I'm sure you'll see the inherent risk of my actions," Hannibal said, unbuttoning his shirt, "I've thought about what you said that night I hosted both you and Alana. And while

we do not need the scrutiny, or anyone speculating about our relationship, I came to the conclusion that I cannot deny you your whims."

Will's heart seized as several wild thoughts raced through his head in fits and starts. *Are we leaving now? Really, tuxedos on the airplane? Someone's wedding?*

Our…?

"Uh," was the only thing that managed to come out of his mouth.

"You wanted to be seen together in public," Hannibal reminded him.

"Is that what I wanted?" Will asked disbelievingly.

"It's what you envied Alana." Hannibal stepped out of his trousers and hung them up in their proper place, leaving him in his underwear. He carefully took down the more traditional tuxedo and put it on the bed, then drew out the black trousers and sat on the edge to put them on.

"Where are we going?" Will wondered aloud, still mentally reeling.

"The opera showcase. Get dressed," Hannibal repeated, standing to latch his trousers and taking down Will's tux from the door, spreading it carefully on the bed as well.

"I'm, ah, I'm not sure I'm…"

Hannibal caught his chin with gentle fingers and lifted Will's lips to meet his. "Get dressed," he insisted. "It's rude to be late."

"What, not fashionable?"

"Never fashionable."

Will laughed softly, picking up the trousers and sliding into them. "Little tight," he complained, adjusting himself. It wasn't helping that he was half-hard still.

"It's a European cut," Hannibal explained, buttoning his pristine white shirt in front of the mirror.

Hannibal finished dressing quickly, an old hand at finery. This gave him time to help Will, which he needed. He watched curiously as Hannibal manipulated the French cuffs and produced a pair of cuff links, which he fastened expertly. They were gold, with an almond-shaped enamel design in a rich, lustrous blue. "These were made in St. Petersburg between 1908 and 1917. Blue translucent enamel over sunburst guilloche." Hannibal finished fastening them, and lifted Will's hand to his lips to kiss it. "I bought them at a jeweler in Paris as a young man. A fledgling killer, if you will."

Patiently, Hannibal positioned him in front of the mirror and stepped in the way for a few moments to tie the bowtie. Will let out a little disbelieving laugh when presented with his own image. "This is, uh…"

“The word you’re looking for is *exquisite* ,” Hannibal said, obscuring his view again to brush his hands through Will’s hair so it lay the way he wanted it. “A rare but debauched delicacy, perhaps? A rite of passage?”

“It’s, uhm, rare, that’s for sure. I think the last time I wore a tux was for high school prom.” He didn’t look like himself, didn’t feel like himself, while Hannibal looked as natural and comfortable as if he could take a nap in a tuxedo if he wanted to. Or do a murder.

Hannibal kissed him, then flashed a self-satisfied little smile. “Shoes are there. I’ll meet you downstairs.”

***

Traffic had been a little heavier than usual, and they arrived at the stately, historic opera house just in time to find their seats and settle in before the lights dimmed. Hannibal had booked one of the private boxes, and while there was certainly room for more chairs, only two had been placed near the railing.

Will recognized Daphne, Hannibal’s friend he’d met at the conservatory, as she strutted out onto the stage wearing a silver dress and black gloves that curved around her elbows. She stepped up to a microphone as the spotlights narrowed onto her. “Welcome, everyone, to the Baltimore Arts Council’s annual showcase. My name is Daphne Dashiell, and I am the chairperson of the council. It is my pleasure to present…”

Will shifted uncomfortably and tried to pull at his inseam without attracting too much attention. In doing so, he was aware that while most of the crowd was looking at Daphne as she made her announcement, several people kept glancing up at their box.

“Why do people keep looking at us?” he whispered to Hannibal as the crowd clapped politely and Daphne left the stage.

“The opera box is not about the best view of the production,” Hannibal told him. “It’s about being seen. That’s what you wanted, isn’t it?”

“Shit,” Will muttered, squaring his shoulders and adjusting his posture, almost as if he could hear Aunt Louise nagging him about it. “You sure this was a good idea?”

“Good idea? No.”

“Are people gonna…”

“Accompanying someone to the opera is not a direct statement of intent. People bring their mothers, visiting friends.” Hannibal looked at him with that same damnable smile. “But it’s not nothing, either.” The applause died down and the curtain rose in a swell of music. “They’re looking, Will,” Hannibal whispered. “Be sure to smile.”

“You’re getting off on this,” Will rasped back before Hannibal shushed him.

The showcase featured different singers performing highlights from several shows, including *The Barber of Seville, La Boheme, Madame Butterfly,* and *Salome.* Will was hyper aware of

being watched, whispered about behind hands, and expended most of his energy and mental effort on sitting up straight and looking like he was paying attention. Over time, though, he let the music take him in. More accurately, he watched Hannibal out of the corner of his eye as he experienced the music. He enjoyed seeing the small changes in Hannibal's facial expression during different pieces, the way he edged forward in his seat or winced as a singer's note was apparently off somehow. In between performances of the showcase, Hannibal would lean over to tell him something of note, whether about the opera, the composer, the character meant to sing that particular aria. Will noticed that he leaned closer every time, until his mouth was very near Will's cheek and ear.

"You wanna know something?" Will said over the thunderous applause after a particularly hefty solo. "You're all about trivia. Knowing… what seems to other people like random information. You'd be, ah, devastating on a pub quiz team."

"What's a pub quiz?" Hannibal asked, his expression so open and honest that Will considered that he may not actually know. He laughed genuinely and brushed his hair behind his ear. When they turned back to the stage, numerous pairs of eyes were on them, and Will felt the color drain from his face as well-dressed people gossiped behind their programs.

The first half of the show ended with "Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* . As Will pretended to watch the singer while actually watching Hannibal, he felt his chest fill with a sweeping, deep-seated sorrow. The ambient pulse in his mind whirred to life, and he began to receive Hannibal's emotions, as if they were directly transmitted to him through wires or radio waves. It was a sweet, aching melancholy, and it felt both beautiful and cruel, ultimately and inevitably tragic. When Hannibal glanced over at him, it was like being shot, and Will knew what that felt like – sudden and sure and violent. Only the bullet this time was… the moment. The music. The connection.

Love.

Hannibal turned his gaze back to the stage. Will watched him openly instead of through his periphery. Tears welled up and spilled over when Hannibal blinked. The sight of them was like another bullet. It was all Will could do not to brush them aside with his fingers. He turned back to the stage, the music melting and deconstructing in his ears. A shadowy form at the edge of the stage caught his eye, waiting in the wings, black on curtain-black. It was the stag, ruffling its feather-fur. A small figure stepped up next to it, materializing from the backstage darkness. Abigail, covered in blood, her throat slashed. Again. This time by Hannibal.

He looked down at his hands, fighting back tears of his own as his heart and mind were torn in two polar opposite directions.

His mind echoed the soft, lilting voice of Miss Kyle, his English teacher in Ohio before he'd transferred schools in the middle of freshman year. *My only love sprung from my only hate! Too early seen unknown, and known too late! Prodigious birth of love is it to me that I must love a loathed enemy.*

Mercifully, the song ended, and the crowd stood to clap. Hannibal paused to dot his cheek with his hand. "What did you think?" he asked over the din.

“I think I want to kiss you,” Will admitted. Hannibal took his hand and they slipped out of the box into the hall. Hannibal pressed him against the wall for only the tiniest moment, delivering the requested kiss, before breaking away, leaving Will breathing hard. Other patrons were streaming out into the hall for intermission, chatting, raving about the sopranos and the orchestra, moving down toward the lobby.

“Arrange your face, Will,” Hannibal said softly to him as they fell in with the crowd.

Will half smiled, a sardonic reflex.

They edged around the crowd that gathered in the lush white and red lobby, waiting in line for the toilets or the bar. Hannibal brought him instead to a room off of the balcony with a gold placard next to it that read *Arts Council Lounge.* It was furnished with a strange but somehow balanced mix of heavy, antique pieces and sleek, modern couches and chairs. Caterers roamed the small group gathered there with trays of champagne and hors d’oeuvres. Hannibal snagged them each a glass just as Daphne spotted them and beckoned them over to her group of well-dressed individuals.

“Hannibal!” she greeted, reaching out with her limp-wristed hand, encased in a glove and a diamond bracelet. Hannibal lifted it to his lips for a kiss. “And Mr. Graham. This is an, ahem, interesting surprise.”

“Will, you remember Daphne from the conservatory.”

“Uh, yeah.” Will nodded awkwardly, feeling every eye in the circle of well-dressed people fixed on him. “N-nice to see you.”

“My paramour, Nelson Miecznikowski.” Daphne put her hand on the arm of a tall gentleman in a pristine tux, his white hair thick and carefully styled.

Nelson shook Hannibal’s hand, then Will’s. “And my dear friends Lucille and Tom Fisher.” The Fishers were a glamorous couple, the wife with sleek honey-colored hair drawn into a chignon, wearing a violently red dress and several strands of pearls. Her husband was much older than she was, and Will was almost fooled by the carefully placed hairpiece.

Tom said, “You look so familiar, Mr. Graham – didn’t I run into you at the symphony last month? You were with Angela Feldman? The Hendersens gave you their season tickets?”

“N-no,” Will said with an apologetic smile. He stole a glance over at Hannibal, who appeared to be eating all of this up with the same relish he’d devoured his ortolan earlier in the night.

“Hmm, I’m sure I’ve seen you before. Do you golf at Hunter’s Ridge? No? Huh, Daphne, can you think– oh, I know! Chamber of commerce!”

“I’m the guy that *didn’t* kill all those people,” Will said flatly. *Except Randall Tier of course.*

Lucille Fisher literally clutched her pearls and Will caught Hannibal out of the corner of his eye doing his best not to grin like the Cheshire cat.

“Will was fully exonerated and released,” Hannibal informed them. Will winced as two more couples looked in their direction and sidled up, not-so-subtly eavesdropping. “Getting his life back. He’s consulting for the FBI again. You remember, of course, Douglas Wilson’s tragic murder? Will was *instrumental* in solving it. If you’ll forgive the term.”

“Yes,” Nelson said eagerly, snagging a canapé from a passing tray. “Horrible business. Is it true Tobias Budge turned him into a human instrument?”

Will narrowed his eyes, then looked at Hannibal, who sipped champagne and waited for his response like everyone else. “Yeah,” he said. “And, ah, he also murdered two police officers, but nobody really talks about that. Their deaths weren’t, uh, very *theatrical* .”

The Fishers shifted uncomfortably, glancing at one another, though Nelson and Daphne were still rapt. “And poor Franklyn Froideveaux,” Daphne reminded them. “Imagine, being murdered by your best friend.”

“Most people who are murdered are murdered by someone they know,” Will said. “And either at home or not far from where they live. So, statistically, if someone’s going to kill you, it’ll be someone you’re close with.”

The group lapsed into a silence that was simultaneously rapt and uncomfortable, depending on the person. Hannibal glanced from face to face, pausing briefly to lock eyes with Will. He might as well have been a cat licking its paws after eating a particularly tasty mouse. Or songbird.

“It’s rare for people to murder without a motive,” Will went on, after downing his champagne in one very undignified drink, setting the empty on a passing tray. “And the people in our lives that know us the best tend to have the most, uh, *motivating* motives. I worked, ah, homicide in New Orleans, and when they say ‘it’s always the boyfriend,’ they mean *it’s always the boyfriend* . ‘Cuz it is. Almost always. So, uhm, Lucille, was it? If your body was discovered tomorrow morning shot, or strangled, or-or hacked up, stuffed in the trunk of your car or something, well, the first person we’d wanna interview is Tom, here.” Will smiled at him and relished the close-lipped grimace he received in return.

“And you were probably killed at home. Because home is where you let your guard down. It’s supposed to be safe.” He shrugged, lifting another drink from a tray as it passed, this one some kind of weird red martini that he drank in another quick mouthful. “But it’s not. You’re also much more likely to be in a fatal car accident within five miles of home.” He gave them his most charming smile in the shocked silence that followed. “So, uh, *Mr. Fisher* , what do you do?”

“I’m in mergers and… acquisitions,” Tom said slowly, shooting his wife a look.

“Mr. Graham, I hope this isn’t too nosy, but I find all of this so fascinating. I heard from someone who works at the concert hall where Douglas Wilson’s body was found that the instrument he was made into was *playable* , is that true?” Nelson stepped closer to speak conspiratorially with Will as Tom and Lucille politely fled, and Daphne drew Hannibal aside.

“Yeah, it was playable,” Will said.

“What did it sound like?” Nelson asked eagerly.

“Uhm…”

“Well, some of the first instruments created were made out of bones. Sometimes human bones. You know, there is a very interesting documentary…”

Will let Nelson’s voice drone into a wordless monotone in his ears as he watched Hannibal with Daphne. If he strained, he could just make out what they were saying, aided by a little lip reading, something he’d picked up in homicide, actually.

“Hannibal.” Daphne gave him a pointed look as she sipped her drink. “Whatever have you done with Dr. Bloom?”

Hannibal’s face was friendly, benevolent. “Daphne…”

“She was lovely, and just right for you – now whatever it is you’ve done, you apologize and bring her back next time,” Daphne scolded.

“And if she doesn’t forgive me?” Hannibal asked, a playful curve of his lips.

“Well, I –” she sighed helplessly, glancing over at Will. “He’ll need to be housebroken.”

Hannibal’s smile grew wider. “I enjoy Will’s particular brand of honesty. I find it entirely refreshing.”

“Oh, Hannibal. As long as you’re happy.” She glanced Will’s way again, without much subtlety. “I must admit, he fills out the tuxedo very, *very* nicely.”

“Doesn’t he?” Hannibal turned and caught Will’s eye with a sneaky wink.

Will looked away quickly, a hot prickle climbing over his cheeks. “...and it really makes clear the filmmaker’s positioning while telling the story, don’t you think?” Nelson’s voice coalesced in his ears again.

“Uh, yeah, it-it sure does. Would you, ah… excuse me for a minute?”

Will spotted a glass door in a bank of windows that seemed to open out onto a terrace. Snowflakes drifted lazily down in the dark, and he could see the outline of a few people standing out there, probably smoking. Still, it seemed dark, and quiet, and the collar of his shirt was impossibly tight all of the sudden. He worked his way quickly through the crowd and opened the door, stepping out onto the narrow terrace.

Baltimore spread out before him, glimmering with lights, the soft whisper of traffic filling his ears as it passed below. The snow muffled everything, dimming the halogen of the streetlamps, collecting on the railing in lines of night-tinted white. Will stepped away from the door and moved along the terrace, pausing to brush at the snow on the railing and clasp onto the cold iron for a few moments. It took a hefty amount of willpower not to untie the

bow tie right then and open up his collar. After a time of breathing in the crisp, wintery air, he felt better.

Hannibal had given him what he'd wanted, after all, though in hindsight he should have specified that he didn't actually *want* specifically go to a Baltimore Arts Council event. And Hannibal likely knew that. He was just, of course, curious about what would happen. Of-fucking-course he was. And Will had to admit, it had been entertaining as hell seeing Hannibal's fancy friends squirm.

He also had to admit that if he was with Hannibal, he could like opera. Feeling what Hannibal had felt during "Liebestod" was as intimate as anything they'd ever done.

And like Tristan and Isolde, and Romeo and Juliet, and so many other star-crossed lovers, things were going to end badly for Hannibal and Will. It was only a matter of time.

Will took another deep breath and clenched his hands around the iron of the railing, then slowly released it and relaxed his muscles. There was no escaping fate. Their tragedy had been told to the audience in the prologue.

"Will?"

Will turned to see Margot Verger of all people. She was wrapped up in a fur coat that mostly obscured the intricately beaded gown she was wearing. Snowflakes landed on her hair, which was pulled back elegantly with jeweled combs. She looked beautiful, but pale, wan, with dark circles under her eyes.

"Margot?"

She approached and drew him further down the terrace, away from the door. "You're the last person I expected to run into tonight," she said.

"Likewise, I guess."

"This Arts Council stuff is a big tax write-off for Verger Meat Packing," Margot explained, hugging her coat tightly around herself and taking a shaky breath. "I'm just here to sign the check for a new soundboard or whatever." She paused. "Having seen your place, I guess I didn't figure you for an opera fan."

"I'm, uh, I'm here with someone," he explained with a little wince.

"Oh." She nodded and took a step back. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to– I'm not here to make any trouble for you. I didn't know you had a… *someone* ."

"It's not like – you and I – that wasn't, um…" *Wasn't cheating?* The jury was still out on that one, though sleeping with Alana hadn't bothered Hannibal in the slightest. Still, he had yet to tell Hannibal what had happened between him and Margot a couple of weeks back.

"You were really sweet to me," Margot said, briefly putting her hand over his on the railing. Her fingers were like ice. "You seem like a decent man, Will. It was a nice night." She paused, taking her hand away. "It won't happen again."

“No,” he agreed. Then, “Are you… are you all right, Margot? You seem…”

“I’m not feeling well,” she admitted. “Touch of the flu.”

“Maybe you should go home and get some rest. Sign the check and head out.”

“I just might do that. Goodnight, Will.”

“Goodnight, Margot.” He watched her lift the train of her gown and go back inside, coat still clutched tightly around herself with the other hand.

Will turned back to the skyline for a few moments before turning to go back in himself. Intermission had to be almost over.

Hannibal was there, having moved soundlessly and paused only a few feet away. “Regrettably, we’ve been called away,” Hannibal said, and Will knew he was being facetious by the little curve of his lips. “A patient emergency, I’m afraid.”

“No, not that,” Will said with a little laugh as Hannibal ushered him back inside. The room was quickly clearing as the lights flickered, singling that intermission was nearly over. Instead of returning to their box, they fled to the Bentley, disappearing without any goodbyes. Will looked for Margot on the way out, but didn’t see her. Maybe she’d taken his advice.

“Did you enjoy yourself, Will?” Once they were on the freeway, he rested his hand on the back of Will’s neck, as he apparently liked to do as he drove.

“Yes,” he said, immediate and honest. “Probably not, um, in the way you thought, or I thought, but yes.” He exhaled a little laugh. “I went over like a lead balloon with those people.”

“Not true,” Hannibal argued, combing through Will’s hair with his fingertips. “Nelson Miecznikowski was certainly charmed. Should I be worried?”

“I don’t think so,” Will replied through a genuine smile. “He was just after the morbid details of the Tobias Budge stuff. Not after me. Besides, he’s, ah, Daphne’s *paramour* .” He said the last word dramatically in a slight mimic of Daphne’s pronunciation that made Hannibal laugh aloud. “Missed your turn again,” Will noted as they passed an exit.

“Don’t ask me to spoil your next surprise, Will. Just be patient.”

“As long as I can patiently adjust myself.” Will groaned and pulled on the inseam of his pants again. “You make it look so easy.” He fiddled around with the collar and the bowtie until Hannibal took his hand away and held it instead.

Before long, Hannibal pulled off the freeway and into a familiar neighborhood. He parked along the curb and came around to open Will’s door, but he’d already stepped out. They were a strange pair, dressed so well on a normal city street, passing a Starbucks, a pet store, and a bakery. When they rounded the corner, Will had to sigh through his smile. Hannibal held the door to The Crawdad Hole open for him.

“This is, uh…”

“Perfect, I know,” Hannibal congratulated himself.

“That’s not what I was gonna say.”

“What were you going to say?”

“I don’t, uh, rightly know.” They stepped through the door. It was late, and only a few of the regulars were gathered around the bar, watching a college basketball game and nursing American beers. A few turned instinctively at the sound of the door opening, and their eyes widened. A couple of them elbowed one another and gestured at the two men in tuxedos that had come through the door.

“Hey, isn’t that the guy that *didn’t* kill all those people?” one slurred to his friend in an exaggerated whisper.

It was just the one, actually, he almost called over to them, then bit the inside of his lip to keep his mouth shut.

“Oh he prolly fuckin’ did and his lawyers got him off!” his friend stage-whispered back. “Just like – like Ted Bundy, man, the ladies love him but he’s a total psycho.”

“Fuck,” Will muttered, but let Hannibal lead him to the table where everything had begun.

Lurlene stepped out from the kitchen and dropped her tray, which was luckily empty. “Oh Jesus!” she exclaimed, planting a hand on her chest.

Get out of here. We don’t serve your kind, Will’s mind anticipated and built up its defense.

“Oh, baby boy!” she shrieked in delight, clomping to him in her platform shoes and throwing her arms around his neck. “I thought I wasn’t never gonna see you again! Where the hell have you been, sugar?” She smacked a kiss on Will’s face, leaving her hot pink lipstick behind. “And you, *meenoo* , my God…!”

“Hi, Lurlene,” Will managed, actively avoiding Hannibal’s pleased facial expression as he bent to pick up Lurlene’s tray for her.

“I just knew you didn’t do anything wrong,” she said, squeezing his arm above the elbow. “I kept sayin’ – didn’t I keep sayin’?” This she directed at the bartender and the regulars who were unabashedly staring at them. “I said, ‘there’s no way that boy did those things they said he did.’ Nobody tips that well and carves people up.”

“It’s, uh, good to be back,” Will said. Lurlene let him go and they slid into the booth.

“Bells, whiskey, and a Sazerac?” They nodded. “Comin’ right up.”

She left them looking at one another, Hannibal openly amused, and Will’s features at last relaxing into a similar look.

“Thank you,” Will said. “For tonight.”

“Even the opera?”

“Even the opera,” Will smirked. “I actually, uh… didn’t hate it.”

“A rave review,” Hannibal said dryly, but then smiled again.

“I think you’d leave this place a similar one,” Will pointed out.

“On the contrary. This place will always hold a significance for me.”

“Thinking of adding it to your mind palace?” Will wanted to know as he glanced over at the bar. Several of the regulars quickly looked back at the TV as if they hadn’t been staring.

“I already have,” Hannibal told him. He slid his leg closer to Will’s under the table, pressing their calves together clandestinely.

Lurlene returned with drinks, and set down a basket of golden nuggets and a little bowl of remoulade. “Gator bites, honey. On the house.”

“Thanks,” Will said genuinely, smiling up at her. “Hey, can you bring me one of those shirts you’re selling at the bar?” Above the bar were several tee-shirts on clothing hangers suspended from the drop ceiling. They were various colors, but all had a picture of a cartoon crawdad holding a mug of beer and the name of the bar beneath it. The back said “Y’all Come Back Now!”

“What size, sugar? Small?”

“Medium,” Will insisted.

“I know his neck measurement if that would help,” Hannibal said.

“No,” Will said.

Lurlene went to the bar and used a broom to lift down a sea foam green shirt with white lettering, checked the tag, and brought it to him. “Perfect, thank you.”

“All right, honey, you let me know when you need a refill.” She clacked off to the bar to watch the game.

Hannibal watched him with clear delight as he struggled with the bow tie, eventually opening it. Will slid out of the jacket, hung it up on the back of the booth, and unbuttoned the top button of his collar. He took his shot of whiskey, then held out his wrists to Hannibal. “Help.”

Hannibal carefully unfastened the cuff links and pocketed them so Will could take off his dress shirt. There was a loud whistle from the bar that they actively ignored as Will wiggled into the tee shirt.

“Comfortable?”

“Yes,” Will confirmed, at last helping himself to his beer and eating a couple of gator bites. “Don’t worry, it’s not an ortolan,” he said. “No competition.”

“Our perception of time changes as we grow older,” Hannibal told him after a sip of Sazerac. “Each year passing more quickly than the last. That being said, it feels like a very long time ago that we met here after making our acquaintance in Jack’s office.”

“And yet, sort of like it was yesterday,” Will mused, playing with the torn label on his beer bottle.

“Why did you ask me that day, Will?” Hannibal wanted to know, tilting his head a few degrees to the left. “After I made such a terrible first impression?”

“You didn’t make a terrible first impression, I did,” Will corrected good-naturedly, rubbing his calf against Hannibal’s again.

“You were rather adamant that I not attempt to psychoanalyze you,” Hannibal reminded him.

“I wasn’t too far off, it turns out,” Will said wryly, bringing his beer to his lips for a moment.

“Still. You waited outside for me. For quite awhile – Jack had many things he wished to discuss before I left.”

Will smiled down at the table. “I know.”

“Why did you do it?”

Will sighed, feeling heat bloom on his face. Even after everything, all this time, everything they’d done, and all of the horror – dear God, the horror – he was embarrassed to say. He glanced over at the bar and did a double-take. Abigail was in the mirror behind the bartender, as if she were seated on a barstool casting her reflection, but the stool itself, on this side of the mirror, was empty.

Why do you keep forgetting about me?

I have to. Long enough to catch him. Please, please believe me.

Will blinked, and Randall Tier had joined her on one side, Georgia Madchen on the other.

You forced me to kill you.

I didn’t force you to enjoy it.

You’re turning into him, Georgia whispered into the mirror.

“Will?”

Will shook his head, tried on a thin smile. He moistened his lower lip, then took a long drink. “J-Jack had… made some comment about me not socializing well. This, from a guy I barely knew – my reputation was *that bad* . And I knew it was true, but I was – I wanted to prove him wrong.”

“Hmm,” Hannibal said, leaning back.

“But,” Will continued, “I could have asked Beverly Katz. Or Jack himself. Price, Zeller, any of them. I could have asked Alana, knowing she would say no, which would give me an excuse to go home to the dogs. But I waited for you.”

“Why?” Hannibal pressed.

“Because I thought you were interesting,” Will revealed with a shy smile and a gentle chuckle. “Despite what I said the next time I saw you.” He sighed helplessly. “And… *really* handsome. Even though I wouldn’t let myself consciously think that was the reason.”

“How do you feel,” Hannibal asked, after another drink, “to be back here again, having made a circle?”

Will paused, considering. “Complete,” he said.

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“You know, Will,” Hannibal said as he hung up Will’s tuxedo jacket, and then his own. “You may have felt out of place tonight, but you captivated those around you effortlessly.”

“People who don’t work with murder really like to talk about murder,” Will said from the bench where he sat to remove his shiny shoes with a satisfied grunt. “And read about it.”

“I don’t see *Tattlecrime* surviving long without Freddie Lounds.” Hannibal worked his bow tie loose and hung it carefully on the rack.

“Good riddance. Let’s hope nobody steps in to try and fill her shoes.” Will slipped off the tuxedo trousers and handed them to Hannibal, who hung them back up with the rest of the outfit. When he turned back, Will was there to help him with his shirt buttons while Hannibal unfastened his own cufflinks. “When I went outside to, ah, catch some air,” he began. He thought of Margot against his will, and deliberately forced her image out of his mind. “What were they saying about me? Your f-friends.”

Hannibal stepped out of his trousers. “You were quite the topic of conversation, Will. But you should be used to that. Even before we met you were a favorite discussion point in psychiatric circles.”

“Everyone I met always said some version of, ‘hey, I’ve heard of you, you’re the twitchy unstable guy with the empathy disorder’.”

“What you’re really asking,” Hannibal said, approaching him now almost fully undressed, Will in his underwear and the Crawdad Hole tee shirt, “is what they thought of you, and if it

pleased me." He brushed Will's hair behind his ear and kissed him, firmly yet with a savoring tenderness. "As if they could understand us."

Will nodded reluctantly, fully understanding how foolish it was.

"All that you should be concerned with is if it pleased me," Hannibal told him as Will put his hands on his shoulders and hip, pressing close.

"Did it?"

"Yes," Hannibal said immediately, and kissed him again, harder this time. "Especially the part where you terrified the Fishers."

Will laughed, tossing his head back as Hannibal kissed his neck before the collar of the tee-shirt stopped him.

"While you were outside, they invited us to a special mass at the Baltimore Basilica. They donated a significant financial gift to the church to refurbish some of the statuary and there's to be an unveiling ceremony."

"That's basically the rich Yankee way of saying 'y'all need Jesus,'" Will told him as Hannibal reached around to cup his hand against the swell of Will's backside and give it an appreciative squeeze.

Hannibal took Will by the shoulder and the hip and spilled them both onto the carpeted floor next to the bed. Will laughed breathlessly as Hannibal pinned him down and kissed his neck. "Pretty big deal, though – if they even have an inkling that we're together like this, and they'd still ask us to go to church."

"I would love you just the same if you were a woman," Hannibal argued, angling his head back up after tonguing the hollow of his throat.

"Right, but let's just say the church doesn't feel the same way. They must really want us to come if they're deliberately looking the other way."

Hannibal rested his chin on Will's chest as Will played with his hair. "Is this important to you? Please forgive me, I'm trying to understand what it is you want."

"I mean, they can deny it all they want. Like how people talk about Achilles and Patroclus. Erasing who they really were to each other. Changing things around so they're, ah, cousins or something."

Hannibal put his hand over Will's mouth, but he was smiling. "What is it you like to say to me, Will? *You're talking way too much* ."

Will caught his palm and licked the spaces between his fingers one at a time. Hannibal made a soft sound of arousal.

"Maybe we should go," Will suggested, touching his hair, one arm curled back behind his head. "Stick it to the church."

Hannibal stroked his cheek with the back of his fingers. “I will admit I find your blasphemy very arousing, Will.”

Will half-smiled playfully up at him, and wrapped his arms around Hannibal’s neck. “Hannibal,” he said sweetly. “Can we please go to the church thing?”

Hannibal nuzzled his throat again, put his teeth gently against it. “I have a condition.”

“Which is…”

“I’m going to make love to you on the floor.”

Will threw his head back and laughed as Hannibal tugged at his clothing. “I guess that’s, uh, *acceptable* .”

“When I’m asked to supplicate myself before their ridiculous idol, I’ll kiss you instead,” Hannibal promised through a smile as Will propped himself up on his elbows to press his lips against Hannibal’s neck. “The Fishers will regret this invitation, I fear. This may be the first and last time we’re invited.”

“Then let’s go out with a bang.” Will reached down and touched Hannibal’s outline.

“A bang.”

“Bang is a slang term for fucking—”

Hannibal silenced him with a kiss, then replaced his mouth with his hand. “If I’m to take you out in public, you must desist with your vulgarities. I have a reputation to uphold.” He said it all through a coy half-smile and Will grinned into his hand.

“I’ll be a real fucking gentleman,” Will said as soon as Hannibal lifted his hand away, his laugh turning into a gasping moan as Hannibal fingered him with a sudden mercilessness.

“You will,” Hannibal assured him, letting him go long enough to rescue the bottle from the bedside drawer.

“Turn the lights on,” Will suggested. “Remember, we don’t hide from God.”

Hannibal adjusted the dimmer switch, making it as bright as possible, and then returned to Will on the carpet. He wet his fingers and went in again. Will exhaled a grateful breath, clutching at Hannibal’s back and shoulder. Hannibal drew his arm under Will’s knee to adjust his position. Looking at Will at this angle seemed to cause physical suffering, and Will watched his face eagerly for further signs of it. He lay in a way he knew was purposefully inviting, one arm thrown up over his head, neck arched, mouth open, the other hand gripping Hannibal’s wrist where he supported himself against the floor. Hannibal used his free hand to push Will’s shirt up to his neck. Will snatched it by the collar and tore it over his head, breaths rapidly increasing as Hannibal went back to work on him.

And in one powerful stroke, Hannibal entered. Will arched his back, then slowly let it relax down onto the carpet again. Hannibal waited, not moving yet, until Will urged him on.

Hannibal took Will in his hand and coordinated his thrusts with the strokes. Will felt powerless in a keenly sensual way, nothing expected of him except to feel everything as deeply as possible, and watch how Hannibal reacted to him. Hannibal's response was perfect, his unmuffled, almost pleading noises and sighs.

He bent over and teased Will's neck with his tongue as he slowed his thrusts and his hand movement. Will put an appreciative palm on the back of his head, tensing in anticipation of the bite. "Ah," Hannibal whispered against his flesh. "Not there. I can't have you bruised, at least where it is visible." He pulled out, continuing his stimulation, and stretched out Will's leg, settling his lips on his inner thigh. "Don't let anyone see this part of your body," he growled. "Do you hear me?"

"Yes," Will managed breathlessly. Never mind that Margot had seen it. Sins of omission.

"Promise me."

"Oh God, Hannibal—"

He slowed his touch. "Promise."

"Yeah, of course I —" Whatever he was going to say was lost in the contorted exhalation of pure pleasure that came from Will's throat when Hannibal bit and sucked at the flesh of his inner thigh, marking him in the same way he'd been marked. Will climaxed immediately.

"Sensitive spot," Hannibal said. "I'll commit it to memory."

Before Will's tremor had ceased, while his breathing was still heightened, Hannibal massaged his entrance and eased his way in again. Will reached up dreamily caressed his face. Hannibal's own climax came swiftly then, emitting no sound but clenching his entire body. He collapsed on Will and held him, breathing heavily into his ear for a few moments before raising his head again for an exhausted kiss, two, three.

"Hope God enjoyed the show," Will said breathlessly.

"Of course he did." Hannibal kissed his neck, up over his chin, his mouth again.

"Maybe not as much as a church collapse," Will noted, still panting a bit as Hannibal settled on top of him, resting his head on his chest, a hand in his hair. Will brushed Hannibal's back as well, stroking his shoulder blade rhythmically. "Hard to top that."

"I'll admit," Hannibal said, his breath tickling over Will's bare nipple, "I am warming to the idea of subverting the intention of this mass with our presence."

"I thought you might."

Reluctantly, Hannibal got on his knees and tucked himself back into his undergarment. Will put his shirt back on and found his shorts hanging on the edge of the bed. "You realize," Hannibal said, getting to his feet, a bit unsteadily, and helping Will up, taking him in his arms. "It's likely we'll be gone by then."

“Long gone,” Will confirmed, and Hannibal seemed powerless against it, kissing him again.

From somewhere in the room came an electronic beep, then another. It was Will’s phone, indicating a text. He’d left it on the table by the fireplace.

“Shit, I forgot to turn it off.” Will broke away as Hannibal folded back the bedding with an air of formality and slid between the sheets. Will rescued his phone and opened the screen just to see who was texting him at this time of night.

Margot Verger.

I have an appt. with Dr. Lecter Wednesday 4:00, I need you to be there too.

… and CUT!

The next scene is Freddie Lounds' corpse (not really!) doing a Tokyo Drift down the ramp of a parking garage, on fire. The body comes to rest in Freddie’s parking spot! This is the whole reason I wanted to use “Arsonist’s Lullabye” for this episode. And how about the upcoming meeting? Turns out… Margot’s pregnant, and Will’s the father! Jack and Will have faked Freddie Lounds’ death, and Will is still playing both sides…

…stay tuned!

Bonus Song: “Liebestod” from *Tristan and Isolde* .

English libretto:

Mildly and gently,

how he smiles,

how the eye

he opens sweetly ---

Do you see it, friends?

Don’t you see it?

Brighter and brighter

how he shines,

illuminated by stars

rises high?

Don’t you see it?

How his heart

boldly swells,

fully and nobly

wells in his breast?

How from his lips

delightfully, mildly,

sweet breath

softly wafts ---

Friends! Look!

Don’t you feel and see it?

Do I alone hear this melody,

which wonderfully and softly,

lamenting delight,

telling it all,

mildly reconciling

sounds out of him,

invades me,

swings upwards,

sweetly resonating

rings around me?

Sounding more clearly,

wafting around me ---

Are these waves

of soft airs?

Are these billows

of delightful fragrances?

How they swell,

how they sough around me,

shall I breathe,

Shall I listen?

Shall I drink,

immerse?

Sweetly in fragrances

melt away?

In the billowing torrent,

in the resonating sound,

in the wafting Universe of the World-Breath ---

drown,

be engulfed ---

unconscious ---

supreme delight!

Season 2 Episode 12: Tome-Wan

Chapter Summary

After the whole Mason Verger... thing... at Will's place, Will and Hannibal clean up, take care of the evidence, then head to a remote West Virginia cabin to "establish an alibi"...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Burning Desire” – Lana Del Ray

“I drive fast, radio blares, have to touch myself to pretend you're there
Your hands were on my hips, your name is on my lips
Over over again, like my only prayer
(Come on tell me boy)
I've got a burning desire for you, baby
(I've got a burning desire, come on tell me boy)”

Will had the opportunity to cut Hannibal’s throat and let Mason Verger feed him to the pigs. Of course, Will probably knew he was going to be fed to them next, and saw an opportunity to save Hannibal and himself. Plus… let’s be real, he can’t kill Hannibal. He releases him instead, and is promptly clocked on the back of the head and passes out. When he wakes up, he finds Carlo fed to the pigs, bloodstains all over the floor, and everyone missing. Heading home, Will discovers Hannibal hanging out with Mason, who is tripping balls and cutting off his face, feeding it to Will’s dogs. Hannibal suggests that Will kill Mason, but Will defers to Hannibal and says, “He’s your patient, you decide what’s best for him.” Hannibal breaks Mason’s neck where he will be paralyzed but not killed.

“He’s still breathing,” Will pointed out. Mason Verger was stretched out on one of Will’s bed sheets near the door. Will could still hear soggy, rattling breaths whistling through Mason’s exposed teeth.

“I severed the spine below the nerve bundle required for his lungs to function independently,” Hannibal said, glancing up from where he was scrubbing blood from the seams of Will’s chair with an old toothbrush.

“You wanted him to live?” Will was bitter, incredulous as he dotted the smaller stains on the floor. The rush of Mason’s downfall was wearing off, and he was tired, hungry, and the back of his head throbbed where he’d been slammed with the butt of a gun.

“You could have killed him yourself.” Hannibal stood up and wiped his hands on a stained rag. “You left him to me.”

“You aren’t, ah, worried he’s going to *tell* someone what you did?”

“Mason can’t tell anyone anything without incriminating himself,” Hannibal promised, kneeling to wipe down the chair leg next.

“Hmm,” Will muttered, finding another splatter on the hardwood to sponge away.

“Would you have wanted to leave poor Margot with nothing?”

“Poor Margot?” Will got to his feet, anger adding to the throbbing pain that traversed the circumference of his skull. “You pity her now, after what you did?”

“Mason sterilized her,” Hannibal reminded him, stepping closer. Will could feel the dark tension between them like a taut band drawing them together.

“At your suggestion. Margot getting pregnant was also your influence,” Will accused him, voice ratcheting up in volume and aggression.

“I had no idea she would come to you to fulfill that duty,” Hannibal reminded him. “You’ve certainly downplayed your role in this. It takes two participants to result in a pregnancy.”

“She told me she was on the pill.”

“And you, the FBI’s most skillful profiler, believed her.” Hannibal’s hand tremored lightly as he clenched the cleaning rag into his fist, coming another cold step closer to Will.

“She was–” Will took a breath, trying to calm himself. “She was hurting,” he said, softer now. “She’d been traumatized, scarred – and I thought she just… needed someone, just for a night.”

“Your compassion for her was inconvenient,” Hannibal said, voice soft but his tone sharp-edged, icy. “What about our plan, Will? What about leaving? You said you’d be a good father. Would you have taken her with us? Taken the child, perhaps? Could you imagine its life with the two of us as we fled the FBI?”

“You said murderers can be fathers.” Will felt his throat constrict, and became aware that he was directly between crying and wanting to kill Hannibal.

“Will.” Hannibal unclenched his fists and closed the distance. Will shied away as Hannibal lifted his hand to touch his face. Hannibal did it anyway, turning Will’s chin to force eye contact. “I’m sorry it had to happen like this.”

Will said nothing, just stared at Hannibal, his chest hollow and on fire at the same time. In the ensuing silence, a thick gurgling came from Mason where he lay on the sheet, followed by a low wail.

“Will,” Hannibal said softly, cupping his cheek with tender fingers. “We can continue this, but it will have to wait.”

“I know,” Will sighed, stepping out of his reach. “I can manage the rest, if you want to load him up. I, uh, need to check on Zoe though. She has a… sensitive stomach.”

“I administered her medicine before you arrived,” Hannibal said, dragging Mason’s limp body into a better position, and folding up the sheet around him. “And she only had three small pieces.”

Will was absurdly touched, his antipathy melting off like spring snow. He stopped Hannibal with a hand on his arm, and kissed him gently, and then immediately chastised himself for it.

Hannibal half-smiled. “Would you like arms or feet?”

“Feet.”

Together, they hoisted Mason up and carried him out to the Bentley, wrapping him in the sheet and stuffing him in the trunk, which Hannibal had already lined with plastic sheeting. They arranged him carefully so as not to further damage his spine, and Hannibal propped his head and neck just right to make sure the airway stayed open.

Hannibal shut the trunk with a satisfying thunk, then opened the driver’s side door. He withdrew a small pad of paper and scribbled a few lines on it before tearing the slip free and handing it to Will. “A cabin just over the West Virginia state line,” he said. “Pack some fishing gear.”

Will nodded, wincing as he gently probed the scabbing-over split on the back of his head.

Hannibal looked like he was going to say or do something else, but after a swollen pause, he got into the Bentley and drove away. Will watched until his tail lights disappeared, then went back inside.

There was a little more cleanup to do, some trash to burn. He fed the dogs and arranged his usual sitter to come and let them out in the morning. Before his arrest, he’d always been able to call on his neighbors for this, but most of them kept their distance, even after he’d been exonerated. He couldn’t really blame them. It was expensive to rely on a pet sitter service, but necessary for times like these.

Will freed the pack out once more, letting them roam the yard as he packed the Volvo – fishing gear, overnight bag, handgun in the center console in case any of Mason Verger’s goons had survived. When he was ready to leave, he checked each animal carefully, wiping clean any bloodstains from their fur with a washcloth lathered up with dog shampoo. “Be good,” he warned them after securing the kennels. “I’ll probably be home tomorrow.”

Winston whined, but Will steeled his heart against it, shutting the door to the kennel room. A shot of whiskey and a handful of ibuprofen, and he was ready.

As he drove, Will contemplated what it was going to be like to say goodbye to the dogs for the last time. He still didn't know what he was going to do with them, who to contact about taking care of them. There was always the option of placing an anonymous tip with animal control and letting the dogs be taken to a shelter to be adopted out. But with Zoe's ongoing medical problems, he doubted she'd be adopted, and might be put down. Finding someone to take all seven would be next to impossible.

Alana did, he thought. *Plus Applesauce. For months.*

Guilt doubled up in his heart and his head. As infuriating as Alana had been, as much as it had hurt that she hadn't believed him about Hannibal, and how hypocritical she'd been claiming that Hannibal was a bad influence on Will, she'd done that for him. Taken care of all seven, gave Zoe her medications and probably held Buster in her lap during thunderstorms, cleaned up Max's fur balls, sacrificed a few pairs of shoes to Harley. He'd loved Beverly, but she probably wouldn't have taken on that kind of commitment.

I dunno how you do it, Will – I managed to kill every houseplant I've ever owned.

As the miles peeled away beneath his tires, the pressure in his head increased. Will rubbed his eyes, trying to clear his vision. The lights of the other cars swam into a constant stream of yellow-white that bled across his view like a smear of paint. Will had the unearthly sense that Hannibal was right beside him, sitting in the passenger's seat. If he didn't know better, he'd think he saw the shadow of the antlered thing with Hannibal's face reflected in the windshield glass. He stopped at a gas station for a coffee, drank it, then pulled over a few miles later to throw it back up.

Vomiting helped with the encroaching sleepiness, and after getting lost twice, he found the cabin, buried deep in the West Virginia woods, the leafless trees and twisted pines dark and savage in the moonlight. The structure seemed old but well maintained, half made of rough-hewn stone, the rest log, with a small porch on the front. Will's flashlight revealed there were no tire tracks in the patches of snow or soggy gravel of the drive. He clicked off the light and listened. He could hear nothing but the quiet rustling of trees in the cold wind and the occasional call of a night bird.

He left his things on the front porch and found the key where Hannibal said it would be, tucked beneath a loose chimney rock. Unlocking the front door, he crept in, flashlight and gun in hand. His head was splitting, and his eyes didn't want to focus. He was desperately tired, but forced himself to go through the motions of clearing every room of the cabin; a cozy living room with a sofa and two overstuffed chairs upholstered in deep red, the attached, open-concept kitchen, bathroom with shower and corner tub, and upstairs sleeping loft with a large bed tucked under the slanted roof. The place seemed stuffy, unused, and there was a layer of dust on the surface of the kitchen table.

Will climbed carefully down the stylishly rough-hewn loft steps and finally let his guard down. He brought his bags inside and locked the door behind himself, drawing all of the curtains before turning a few lights on. Sinking onto the sofa, he lay down with a groan. Closing his eyes was a special kind of heaven. Still, he kept his ears alert for the sound of the Bentley or someone pursuing them from Muskrat Farm. There was only the wind in the trees and his own breathing.

Will started, opening his bleary eyes.

Don't go to sleep. Need to stay alert.

His eyes wouldn't stay open, and he sank, against his will, into the warm embrace of darkness.

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"I've muzzled the dog. Now it's time for you to put him down." Mason Verger handed Will the knife.

Hannibal hung before him, suspended in the straitjacket, his feet limp and bare. He looked at Will with a soft expression, so like the one he often wore after they'd made love. Will raised the knife and put it at Hannibal's throat.

Instead of the squealing of pigs in the pen below, he heard the furious barks and growls of his dogs. They were mad with fear. Or was it hunger?

"No one can be fully aware of another human being unless we love them. And by that love we see potential in our beloved. Through that love, we allow our beloved to see their potential."

Will let the blade nick Hannibal's neck, just enough for a few drops of blood to travel lazily down the knife and drip onto his hand, ruby red, warm, beautiful. "Expressing that love," Hannibal continued softly, "our beloved's potential comes true." He smiled. "I love you, Will."

"Don't bleed him out!" Mason snapped as Will's arm tensed to increase the pressure. "Just a little bit to give the pigs a taste."

Will turned to Mason Verger. Reaching out with his free hand, he snagged the furry collar of Mason's coat and slit his throat instead. Hot blood splattered Will's face, getting in his mouth, his eyes. Through a haze of red, he grappled Mason over to the edge of the pit. His dogs howled up at him, snapping their jaws, eyes alight with some kind of primordial, demonic fury. Will tossed Mason down to them, and they surrounded him on all sides, tearing at his throat, ripping at his face.

"Good boy," Will said when Winston severed Mason's upper lip from his face in a long stretch of flesh.

Will woke up.

A cheerful orange glow, gentle on his eyes, was coming from somewhere close by. As he rose to the surface of his consciousness, he could hear the logs of a fire popping and hissing. He smelled sweet smoke, and something like warm butter and fried eggs. Will opened his eyes fully, but they didn't want to focus. With a muffled groan, he rubbed them to see if it helped.

Sort of. The vague shapes of things swam into focus. Turning on his side, he saw movement in the kitchen, a figure made of soft blue and rich brown. Easing himself up, blinking furiously, he waited patiently until his eyes adjusted. Hannibal was in the kitchen, standing at

the stove island over a steaming pan. When he noticed Will looking at him, he turned off the burner and slipped a cover over the cast-iron skillet before opening the freezer and removing a white cold pack. Wrapping it carefully in a towel, he approached the couch, picking up Will's discarded flashlight on the way.

Hannibal handed him the ice pack, then tilted Will's chin up. He flicked the flashlight on, aiming the beam at the side of Will's eyes to check the pupil reactions, then bent his head forward, spreading Will's bloody hair with the fingers of one hand and holding up the light to check the wound. "Headache? Dizziness?"

"Headache yes, dizzy, off and on," Will reported, wincing at the volume of his own words.

"Some sound and light sensitivity. Nausea?"

"Uh, on the way up, but it's gone now."

Hannibal took his hand away from the back of Will's head and clicked off the flashlight, setting it on the split-log coffee table. "You have a mild concussion," he reported. "Symptoms should be better over the next few days."

Will gingerly lifted the ice pack to the swollen place on the back of his head and contorted his face in pain as the cold touched the wound.

"May I?" Hannibal motioned to the sofa. Will sighed, but slid over to let him sit. Hannibal took the ice pack from him and pressed it securely against the swollen area. "Lie down, Will."

Will resisted for a few moments, but found his resolve crumbling. He was just too tired, too full of horror and violence and the delectable aftermath of the administration of justice. Yes, Hannibal had influenced Mason into sterilizing Margot, but it couldn't have taken much. It was going to be much harder for him to terrorize his sister now, trapped in a bed or a wheelchair, at her mercy. Will had hated Mason's face ever since he'd met the guy, and now he didn't have one. So there was that.

He let Hannibal guide him down to rest his head on his lap, positioning the ice carefully on his thigh so that it fit snugly against Will's injury. Relief flooded the area as the angry flesh was soothed and the pain behind his eyes receded. It felt so good that he didn't mind at all when Hannibal used his free hand to stroke back Will's hair and curl it behind his ear, fingers gentle as feathers on the flesh of his forehead and temple.

"You said you were curious about what would happen if you guided Mason Verger and I toward one another." Hannibal's fingers closed on his hair, giving it the gentlest of tugs. "I asked you to close your eyes and imagine what you would like to happen. Tell me, Will, did your wish come true?"

Will closed his eyes briefly, focusing on the feel of Hannibal's fingertips as they traversed his brow before the side of his thumb brushed Will's cheek. "When I closed my eyes, I saw myself kill you." He reached up and curled his hand around Hannibal's thigh. "That doesn't mean that's what I wanted."

“Hmm.” Hannibal stroked his cheek again, the pad of his thumb making a gentle scratching noise against Will’s stubble. “You kill me, Mason kills you, Margot is sterile – and Mason wins again. Best we avoided that.”

“That’s not why I didn’t want to kill you,” Will said. “At least in that moment. I wasn’t thinking ten steps ahead like you always are. Right there, uhm, the, ah… the knife in my hand… I didn’t kill you because I – *didn’t want to.* ”

Hannibal didn’t speak right away, but when he did, his voice was somber, burdened, yet tender. “In love, we take leave of our senses. Hatred allows us to be calculating and exact, whereas love exists purely in the moment. No future, no past.”

“And that’s why you don’t love anyone,” Will said before he could stop himself. “Because you have to calculate.”

Hannibal said nothing for a long, long time. His hand on Will’s hair trembled slightly as it continued the soothing caresses. At last, he said, “You often compromise my calculations, Will.”

It was as close as he had ever come to saying it. Will waited, the ethereal notes of hope playing on the harp in his heart.

“Come and eat,” was what Hannibal eventually said. He helped Will sit and stand, catching his elbow when he wavered. “You shouldn’t have driven here, but I didn’t see another option.”

“I’m okay,” Will assured him, sinking into a chair at the round table made of the same rustic logs.

Hannibal went to the kitchen and returned with plates. “Eggs, blood sausage, fresh fruit,” he said, setting down Will’s plate, then returning with cups of a mild tea with a berry undertone. “You had the gleam of hunger in your eyes tonight. I thought you might ask Mason to cut you a piece.”

Will thought the comment would put off his stomach, but it had no effect whatsoever. Everything was delicious, as usual. “What’s in the sausage?” he asked after a sip of tea.

“Pork shoulder. Duck fat. Blood. A recipe takes about a half-gallon. And, of course, natural casing.”

Will sliced off another chunk and ate it. “Paprika?”

Hannibal smiled. “Yes. That too.”

“Speaking of pigs and, ah, gallons of blood, what’d you do with him?”

“I took him where anyone would take an injured pig. To the large animal veterinarian. They open in… two hours.” Hannibal consulted his watch. “And he’ll be there waiting for them. Stabilized, of course, and happy, I’m sure, full of animal tranquilizers.”

“Very fitting,” Will said, and it was. “What was it Margot said? Mason always wins?” He took a bite of the eggs and made an appreciative sound. “Not this time,” he added after swallowing.

“As long as Mason Verger breathes, and has access to his money, he will remain a threat,” Hannibal said after polishing off his sausage. “But we’ll be leaving soon. And he will join many others lamenting their missed opportunity.”

After they’d finished, Hannibal had him remain in the chair long enough to check the head wound again. He dabbed at it with a warm, wet cloth, pulling back immediately as Will winced and sucked in a pained breath. “Let me clean it. It doesn’t need stitching.” Will held as still as possible as Hannibal retrieved the cabin’s first aid kit from under the sink and disinfected the small gash after sponging all the dried blood out of Will’s hair and off of his temple.

“Go and rest.” Hannibal directed him toward the loft and the bed. “I’ll be up shortly.”

Will undressed to his shorts and slid his sore body in between the cold sheets, resting his aching head on the foreign pillow. He closed his eyes and dozed, sensing the time passing. When he opened them, the room was darker, and Hannibal was standing by the small window, wearing his black robe, hair slicked back as if he’d showered. He paused, looking down at Will with a tender expression. Behind him, through the window, Will could see a vast expanse of stars. They were deep in the country, far away from city lights, and the clear night revealed vast portions of the galaxy.

Hannibal stood before it, his lover and the Chesapeake Ripper, undulating between the thing with antlers and the human body he’d come to love, the shifts like ripples of water spreading out from a pebble dropped in a pond. Cosmic horror. Lovecraftian. The cabin, the desolate woods, his half-blurred vision, Hannibal here, standing at the side of the bed like a specter – the entire world was a surreal tableau of shadowy imaginings.

So much about this feels like a dream.

Dreams prepare us for waking life.

It’s one thing to dream. It’s another to… understand the nature of the dream.

“Maybe it’s the concussion, but, ah… you’re looking particularly *celestial* tonight,” Will said, his voice soft but in no way tentative. “Numinous, even.” He reached for Hannibal only to have him draw away. Will sat up with a small sound of displeasure.“You had another close call today. Closest since Matthew Brown. And there was Tobias Budge before that. I know how you *get* after almost losing your life.” The thought alone ratcheted the tension in his body, his blood heating up in response to the flashes of memory, of Hannibal’s passion in response to being reminded of the temporary nature of his life.

“Yes,” was all Hannibal said, looking down at him, one hand resting on the knot of the robe tie.

“Brush with mortality.”

“For both of us,” Hannibal reminded him.

Will sighed, putting his arm behind his head and tracing his fingers down his own bare chest, lingering over the line of hair below his navel. “Are you gonna fuck me or not?”

Hannibal didn’t answer, just looked down at him for a long moment. After the silence, he put his ivory fingers to the knot of his robe and slowly unraveled it. After releasing his garment to the floor he paused. “Wait there a moment,” he requested.

“Don’t be long,” Will complained as he went down from the loft only to return with a full wine glass and a bottle of some kind of skin product.

Hannibal handed him the glass and watched him until he drank from it. “Your skin has a texture I’ve never felt before,” he said softly, putting the sweet oil on his hands. “You should take better care of it.” Sitting on the edge of the bed, he anointed Will’s bare collarbone, his throat, his shoulders, pausing every few minutes to descend on Will’s fervent lips for a few stolen kisses.

Will felt a deep mellow relaxation steak over his body as Hannibal instructed him to drink again. It mixed beautifully with the now painfully insistent desire. Hannibal stood again and finally freed himself of the last of his clothing. He went to the thermostat on the wall and kicked up the heat, then paused and regarded Will, running a hand through his hair, so much a statue of antiquity.

Despite the warm relaxation of Hannibal’s careful treatment, Will couldn’t wait another second. He pushed back the sheet and got to his feet, the world swimming a bit, his muscles languid and his vision a bit blurry.

“What are you doing?” Hannibal demanded in a dangerous, quiet way.

Will slid against him, shivered slightly at the chilly flesh. Hannibal was immobile as he worked his lips against his throat. In a flash, Hannibal had him by the neck and one wrist. “I will come to you when I’m ready.” He paused, listening, perhaps, to Will’s tortured breathing. “Admittedly, I sometimes miss the days you were delivered to me in handcuffs.”

Will pulled Hannibal’s hand away from his neck and tried to get close again, blood rising – this was a game he enjoyed. If it was a game, that is.

“I see.” In a swift movement that Will could barely track in his dreamlike state, Hannibal forced him back on the bed, face down, a knee in his back. Will couldn’t turn his head to see, but there was the sound of cloth, and then Hannibal drew his arms roughly behind his back, binding them fast with painfully tight knots. Probably the robe tie, but he couldn’t be sure. Will resisted for a few moments before releasing the tension in his body in a sweet cascade. The fight was over. As if it could have ended any other way.

Hannibal was inevitable, as in all things. *You don’t want me to have anything in my life that’s not you.*

We are just alike. You’re as alone as I am and we’re both alone without each other.

Instead of terrifying him, or making him long for some other kind of connection, the memory of those words only served to strengthen Will's considerable desire, breaking him out in a sweat. The fire of it consumed him, burning up the headache and the pulled muscles and any emotional trace of what they'd endured that day. It even made Mason's bloody, featureless face disappear completely from his mind.

All he wanted was Hannibal.

Hannibal left him on the bed, laying on his side with his arms bound behind his back. The lights of the cosmos rippled over Hannibal's chest as he moved. The robe tie binding Will was soft but durable. With a little time he could get free, but if he stayed as he was, would Hannibal come to him? Indecision and lust and heat wove through the fibers of his body.

Hannibal plucked up the wine from the bedside table and tasted it again, eyes on Will, watching what he would do. Curious as always. Will waited, trying to control his impulses. Still, he couldn't help himself - he began picking at the knots, slowly, as silently as he could.

Hannibal finished his wine and stole his tongue over his bottom lip. He took his time approaching the bed, and reaching out to brush Will's thigh with his cool fingertips. "I see you can be patient, if you choose," he murmured, kneeling over Will on the bed, hands on either side of his midsection, leaning over slowly for a languid kiss, his fingers stealing through Will's hair, tugging it gently. Will shivered; wherever Hannibal touched him made the hairs on body rise, a braille of chill desire.

Hannibal put his hand to Will's flushed cheek, trying to warm it, then held it to his mouth. "Breathe," he instructed. Will did, exhaling warm air onto his palm. Hannibal took a few breaths onto his chilly skin before he dared reach down to slide his hand into Will's underwear and between his legs. Will tossed his head back, arms numb from the bindings, emitting a placid sound of true appreciation. Hannibal stripped his last garment free and finally molded their bodies together, and Will shivered again, though the hand on him was still warm, especially with friction, and the combination of warmth and chill sent shocks through his nerves. He strained against the bindings again, working his fingers in the knots clandestinely.

Hannibal kissed him, his jawline, down over his Adam's apple, to the place where his clavicles met, then around the side of his throat. Will waited in feverish anticipation for any kind of penetration but it didn't come, and Hannibal's hand teased maddingly, bringing him close and then backing off again. "Hannibal, for God's sake—" he managed.

"God isn't listening," Hannibal growled as he grazed his teeth along Will's throat again, without even the force required to leave a mark.

"Do it — please—"

"I need to teach you patience, Will." Hannibal pulled his face away from Will's neck and hovered over him, eyes level with one another. Hannibal ran a smooth, cold finger down his cheek, thumbed his lip. "Though if I am to fully disclose my experience, I find that I will have great pleasure teaching it to you."

“Full disclosure? Your knots could use some work.” Will slid the fabric bindings free from his arms in a smooth motion and executed a reversal, putting him on top of Hannibal’s hips, holding his wrists. Hannibal’s eyes flashed mahogany fire in surprise and he parted his haughty lips to draw a sharp intake of breath. Will capitalized on this and kissed him, with intrusive tongue, before Hannibal turned his head to the side and had to settle for tonguing his throat.

The slightest silent laugh, that half-smile. “To your credit, that surprised me.”

“Just embracing my instincts. Which, admit it – you like. All I need to know is that I’m… *waking up* to who I am.” Will smirked down at him. The smile melted when Hannibal, appearing to expend no energy whatsoever, forced him back onto the bed with his arms locked over his head, caged in one immensely powerful hand.

“Give yourself to me.”

Will’s muscles slowly relaxed beneath Hannibal’s grip. He nodded.

“Good.” Hannibal resumed his litany of touches and tantalizing kisses along the slope of his throat. Will sighed out a moan that became a gasp when Hannibal finally brought him within moments of climax before stopping yet again.

“Fuck,” Will panted, arching his back in frustration.

“Don’t move.” Hannibal let him go slowly, waiting to see if Will would rebel or not. Will forced himself to stay still, in the same position, arms crossed above his head. “Good,” Hannibal complimented again, taking the bottle of oil and pouring some into the cup of his hand. He took Will by the wrists again with one hand and used the other to prepare him, again with the same maddeningly slow but sensual process. Just a circling of the entrance, a few kisses, then one exploratory finger, moving slowly and deliberately keeping away from the sweet spot. Now two fingers, stretching, but again, in small, torturous increments.

“Please,” Will begged. “Can you – hurry…?”

“Haste is often the demise of a good recipe, or any other work we do,” Hannibal said conversationally as Will took a begging breath. At last, though, he took himself in his hand and pressed forward. Will relaxed himself as best he could, but Hannibal teased him again, just circling with the head now instead of pushing in. He let Will’s wrists go and used this hand for stability now as he lowered his head to kiss Will again, still taunting him with pressure and then release.

Finally, Will couldn’t stand it anymore and reached between them to put his hand over Hannibal’s, fingers grasping at the flesh of his wrist. “I find you very *interesting* – but if you keep this up I *will* kill you.”

Hannibal sat back on his heels, pulling himself away entirely from Will for a punishing moment before resuming the position and easing his way inside, his press insistent but slow. Will reached around to grab his ass in one hand, thigh in the other, and pulled, sliding Hannibal in to the hilt, each of them emitting gasping, satisfied grunts and sighs. Hannibal

began his movements, slowly at first of course, making Will wait yet again for what he wanted, which was a harder, faster rhythm. “Please,” was all he could say to express that specific want. Hannibal understood and gave him what he wanted at last, the heavy log headboard now banging into the wall, rattling things on shelves and in cupboards.

He climaxed looking over Hannibal’s shoulder at the stars. The sensation was exquisite, and Will rode the crest as long as he could, his heartbeat growing progressively slower as moments passed. Hannibal clutched him suddenly, his own muscles seizing, and he heaved a great sigh, slowly releasing their tension.

Will felt disengaged from reality, riding on the verge of consciousness. Hannibal drew Will to himself and folded them both beneath the sheets. Enveloping him from behind, Hannibal kissed the back of his neck and his hair. Will’s breathing was shallow, labored, and he felt encapsulated in Hannibal’s scent, his embrace. Hannibal dreamily lifted a discarded robe tie and used it to fasten Will’s wrists together in front of him, the knots tight but ultimately symbolic. Will watched him do it, his body threaded through with the dull anguish of trauma and the wake of intense pleasure. Exhausting. Awful, but perfect.

At last they rested, twined together, their bodies pliable with blood and heat. “Your warmth is a treasure,” Hannibal whispered against the back of his ear as he slid his arm beneath Will’s neck and folded him even closer. His free hand traveled around Will’s midsection to caress his ribs, trace their origins, fondle the flesh over his heart, then draw downward to settle over his navel, the thumb only working now against the little rise just below it. “I would be content to spend many years just as we are now.” He put his cheek against Will’s hair. “I admit a growing disdain for a solitary life.”

“That’s a given, isn’t it?” Will’s voice sounded far away, whispery in his own ears. “Considering we’re running off *together* ?” He might not be able to stay conscious, his vision blackening, but still that edge of smart ass. Again, that deliberate knowledge that he was provoking Hannibal. Gluttony for punishment. Mix it with the carnality and you had two deadly sins for the price of one.

Hannibal waited a minute or two before speaking again. Will hadn’t realized he’d never answered. “I have not felt the need for tenderness in many years.” He craned his head up and kissed the back of Will’s shoulder in several delicate ways. “Sleep, Will.”

“Thought you weren’t supposed to sleep on a concussion,” Will murmured, his eyes drifting shut.

“It’s important to rest, but not to sleep more than usual. I’ll wake you early.” Hannibal turned Will to face him, his hands resting between them.

Will moved his bound hands up together, leaving one a fist, the other open, and stroked Hannibal’s face. “I’m sorry.” He said it reflexively but realized he meant it.

“For what?”

“Margot,” Will said.

Hannibal took his hands in his own, and kissed him then, with a velvet passion he hadn't before, a mix of sultry and sweet. "Release your burdens," Hannibal whispered to him, tracing his fingers along Will's hairline, behind his ear. "And I'll release mine. They'll be left behind for a new life soon enough."

Will nodded, a subtle movement. Hannibal pulled him close and they slept in the star-strewn darkness.

… and CUT!

The next scene opens with Mason's new life – bedridden, wearing a mask to hide his hideously deformed face. Jack comes to call, asking what happened. Mason says he took a tumble in the pig pen, and was rescued, but not before the pigs ate his face. He has no intention of getting the authorities involved, only in plotting his revenge. Margot, however, says she'll take care of Mason the same way he took care of her. Buckle up, Fannibals. You know what episode comes next…

… stay tuned!

Season 2 Episode 13: Mizumono

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal agreed that it was best to keep apart for these last few days before Jack's Last Supper, outside of their therapy appointments. Will wakes up from his dream about hunting the murder stag and can't stay away from Hannibal. Their time, they both know, could be short. They are on the event horizon of chaos.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Raining in Baltimore” by Counting Crows

“This circus is falling down on its knees
The big top is crumbling down
It's raining in Baltimore fifty miles east
Where you should be, no one's around
I need a phone call
I need a raincoat
I need a big love
I need a phone call
These train conversations are passing me by
And I don't have nothing to say
You get what you pay for
But I just had no intention of living this way
I need a phone call
I need a plane ride
I need a sunburn
I need a raincoat
And I get no answers
And I don't get no change
It's raining in Baltimore, baby
But everything else is the same
There's things I remember and things I forget
I miss you
I guess that I should
Three thousand five hundred miles away
But what would you change if you could?
I need a phone call
Maybe I should buy a new car
I can always hear a freight train
If I listen real hard
And I wish it was a small world

Because I'm lonely for the big towns
I'd like to hear a little guitar
I think it's time to put the top down
I need a phone call
I need a raincoat”

This “cut unscene” begins after Will has his dream about hunting with Garret Jacob Hobbs, and Hannibal visits Bella Crawford in the hospital.

Garret Jacob Hobbs no longer haunts brutally, a specter fuelled by guilt and indecision. Now he is a guide, a harbinger, a symbol of things to come. Garret Jacob Hobbs stands next to him now, a corpse and a promise. He stands next to Will as he once stood next to Abigail, giving his silent encouragement as Will lifts the rifle.

I have made you for this. I made you a holy avenger, I made you righteous. I gave you your first taste of vigilante justice. I breathed life into you. Hannibal coaxed it, developed it, perfected it, but without me, you would have never been born.

I will always be with you.

And it’s time to claim your trophy. Because if anybody deserves your vengeance, it’s Hannibal Lecter.

He’s killed legion.

He killed Georgia and Beverly.

He killed your baby.

He killed our daughter.

It’s time, Will.

Will sights down the barrel of the gun and tracks the black stag that stalks the woods below the treestand that was also his house. He has the shot. The bullet will go straight to the heart. For even after all that has happened, the stag deserves a clean kill.

And we will honor every part of him.

The shot in his dream woke Will from a deep slumber. His body sat him up without his brain having to give the conscious command, his throat sucking in lungfuls of air.

Winston broke protocol and left his bed, leaping up on Will’s and snuffling against the side of his face, pawing at his arm and leg, whining piteously. Breathing heavily, Will raised his hand

and wiped away the beads of sweat that had gathered on his forehead. At last, he put his arm around Winston and let the dog lick his face. “Okay, okay, okay,” he whispered. “I’m okay. I’m okay, Winston.”

Winston tried to get in his lap like he was a much smaller dog. Will put his arms around and squeezed him tight for a moment, pressing his face into Winston’s fur. Then he released his hold and ordered the dog back to his bed.

It was only 10:00. Will had collapsed into bed earlier than usual, emotionally drained after spending hours going over his plan with Jack at the BSU. The plan itself wasn’t exhausting. Maintaining his façade, the constant shifting lies – that was what ultimately ran his brain ragged. Hannibal and Jack had both asked him, “ *When the moment comes, will you do what needs to be done* ?”

Ay, there’s the rub. Because Will knew what needed to be done, what should be done, what law and morality said should be done.

But he also knew what he *wanted* to do. What love instructed. And these were opposite things.

He got up and changed his pillow case, giving the sheets a bit of time to dry. Pouring himself a whiskey, he stepped into the shower for a few minutes, adjusting the water from cold to warm to and back again. Sliding into a clean pair of boxers, he got back into bed and tried to quiet his mind.

Not happening. Whereas before he’d been exhausted by his shifting plans and loyalties, now he was wired, anxious, edgy, full of an unexpressed energy he couldn’t account for. He wanted Hannibal. He wanted the sweet and easy peace, and the post-coital clarity of his intentions.

But they’d agreed it was best to only see one another during scheduled “therapy sessions” in the days leading up to the dinner party. Jack’s last supper. Their last supper in this life. Showing up together at the opera had caused a stir, as Hannibal had said it would – Jack had asked him about it directly, and Will had had to explain that it was all part of getting Hannibal to buy into his loyalty.

“We don’t want to tip our hand,” Hannibal had warned him.

But would a visit really matter if nobody knew except the two of them?

Will was barely aware he’d made a decision before he found his body getting up and putting on dark clothes – gray pants and a black tee-shirt with a deep green sweater. He skipped his coat and shoved his black knitted cap over his head. He fed the dogs again, even though they’d already had their dinner, and let them out for a hasty break before getting in the car and driving into the city.

He expected to have second thoughts on the drive, but they never surfaced. Yes, they’d agreed that staying away from one another was important in this delicate time, this event horizon, this cusp of chaos. But simply knowing that they weren’t supposed to see one

another made the magnetic force that drew him towards Hannibal stronger than it had ever been.

What had Hannibal said to him once? Forbidden things tasted better.

Besides, these countdown days might be their last. Jack might kill Hannibal. Jack might kill him if he tried to defend Hannibal. Hannibal might kill him if he tried to defend Jack. And, best case scenario, Jack and Will might subdue Hannibal and send him away forever. While Hannibal had found a way for them to be together when Will was locked up, Will was in no way confident that he'd be able to do the same. A killer with four or five victims was one thing. The security around the Chesapeake Ripper would be something else entirely.

Hannibal's house was dark, but the Bentley was in the driveway out back. Will parked a few blocks away and walked quickly through the quiet streets, circling around to the back alley. He crept up to the Bentley and touched the hood. Still warm. Hannibal hadn't been home long.

Will snuck around back, and found the small courtyard off the dining room. There were planters that likely held vegetables and herbs in the warmer months, as well as a large meat smoker, a charcoal grill, a huge gas grill, and a roasting pit, all wintering under tight covers to protect them from the elements. Will inched along the side of the house to the large bank of dining room windows and peered inside. The room was dark and deserted, the table shining, bare save for a vase of fresh-cut flowers.

Will reached into his pants pocket and withdrew a thin strip of metal. He eased it between the window frame and the latch, and jimmied it until he managed to pop it open. It was interesting that it wasn't locked – this was how he'd gotten inside the last time he'd arrived unannounced to stick a gun in Hannibal's face. It was as if Hannibal wanted to keep the way open for him, even if he meant to pull off a home invasion.

He stepped noiselessly inside and slipped off his shoes and hat. Breathing shallowly, he crept to the staircase and hugged the wall to avoid the antique steps' signature creaks. Will was unarmed, but a cool confidence swept through him. This felt like stalking. And he enjoyed it.

He eased the door to Hannibal's chamber open. The bedside light was on. Hannibal was asleep, partially covered by the sheets and soft white blankets, the heavy comforter folded neatly at the end of the bed. One of his legs peeped out, and the coverings were pulled most of the way up his bare chest, arms free. A book rested next to him. He had his thumb tucked between the pages as if he meant to open it again any second.

Will smiled, an affectionate reflex, and flipped a switch at his side that turned off the light. The room went dark until the moonlight crept in. Hannibal was deeply asleep, mouth open slightly, his breathing soft and even. His face was relaxed, cleared of worry, free of strife. Impossibly elegant, deceptively innocent. Lying there, unguarded, exposed, the embodiment of temptation itself. It thrilled him, the sudden knowledge that with him here, Hannibal was, or at least could be, in danger.

Will *was* dangerous. So rarely did he allow himself to wallow in this knowledge and feel no hint of remorse. But now, in this darkened room, with Hannibal mere feet away, he let it

come. He loved Hannibal for a thousand reasons, his only real love, a love until the world burned. But beneath it all was the rotten vein of truth, a truth he was often too afraid to acknowledge. The other side of the coin was death. And he was fooling himself if he thought Jack wasn't right and that Hannibal didn't deserve to die.

He crept closer, and paused at the foot of the bed. Soundlessly, with aching slowness, he slipped off his sweater. The moon glimmered through the windows, and the filmy curtains swayed ever so slightly in the drafts innate in older houses. Bathed in shadow, he lurked for several minutes, utterly embracing the feeling of his monstrousness. He was the pale-fleshed, fierce-eyed creature of gothic novels, the ghoul, the maudlin monster of black and white movies. Will reached a hand out, and let its shadow cut into the moonlight that fell over Hannibal on the bed. He guided his shadow fingers up Hannibal's chest until they lingered over his throat.

Closer he came, moving up the side of the bed until his long shadow fell over Hannibal completely. He reached out and eased the book out of Hannibal's hand and set it on the bedside table next to the lamp. The next part would be tricky, but not beyond his ability, especially with how deeply Hannibal slept.

The ember of regret that lived in him extinguished as he put his fingers around the edge of the soft white sheets. With a predator's patience, he slipped them off of Hannibal one inch at a time, slowly revealing him to the moonlight; first, his collarbone, then pectorals, chest hair, nipples. Lower still. The cut of his abdominals, the divots on his hips, then the rest of his body, battle scarred, the shadow of the burn still visible where Mason's goons had tased him. Will rested his hand a half inch above Hannibal's thigh, feeling the heat that radiated from his skin. Hannibal slept on, his only movement a twitch of the fingers on his left hand.

Will climbed on the bed with the same jaguar slowness, putting a knee on either side of Hannibal's hips and planting his hands, easily holding his position, hovering over his victim. In no hurry, Will lowered his head and breathed Hannibal's scent. It coursed into his body and snapped at his desire like a taut string.

Hannibal shifted in his sleep, sliding his now bookless hand under the pillow, turning his head in the other direction. Will leaned in, to do what, he wasn't entirely sure.

In a blink, Hannibal had pulled a small but dangerous knife from beneath the pillow, holding the point against the major artery in Will's neck. He did this, somehow, with his eyes closed. Will stiffened and ceased his movement.

Hannibal opened his eyes and regarded him coolly. "Good evening, Will."

"H-Hannibal," he said by way of greeting, pulse suddenly pounding against the tip of the knife that rested on his skin.

"Are you here to kiss, or kill?" Hannibal posed the question like he was asking someone if they wanted white or wheat toast with breakfast.

Will chuckled nervously, backing off the blade an inch or two. Hannibal kept it pressed against his throat. "Be still," he warned.

After a long, drawn out moment where they simply stared at one another, breathing shallowly, Hannibal pressed the blade against his neck, dimpling the skin, but not hard enough to breach it. Will let the blade's direction guide him to the side, and he slowly climbed off of Hannibal and onto his back. Hannibal reversed their positions, keeping the knife at exactly the right point. A puncture, even a small one, would cause a whole-body bleed-out.

Keeping the knife on target, Hannibal ran a hand down Will's chest, then felt around his pockets, probably to see if he was armed. "Bend your knees," he requested, and Will complied, allowing Hannibal to feel along his legs from ankle to thigh, checking for hidden dangers. At last, he wrapped his hand around Will's rapidly stiffening outline and gave it a firm squeeze that made him gasp. "I see. This appears to be your only concealed weapon."

Will laughed through his next sigh as Hannibal massaged him through his pants for a few tantalizing moments. "I know I'm not supposed to be here."

"We agreed, Will. Stay apart until the dinner party, save your appointments."

"I know," Will said. He tried to sound rueful, but he couldn't really bring himself to regret it.

"Did anyone see you arrive?"

"No. Not as far as I know. Circled the block a few times and, ah, didn't see any surveillance."

Hannibal's hand constricted further and Will winced before relaxing again into Hannibal's grip. "Let yourself in through the dining room window again?"

"Yeah, it's so strange – like someone, ah… *purposely* didn't lock it." He raised an eyebrow and let the corner of his mouth twitch up.

"It does appear that way." Slowly, Hannibal eased the knife away from Will's throat. He backed up on his heels and opened the bedside drawer, trading the dagger for the lube, which he hid under the pillow where the knife had been. Will smiled as he climbed back into bed and pulled Will on top of him, recreating the moment before he'd brandished a weapon. "Please, proceed."

Will kissed him now, gently at first, as if the knife had never happened and he was just trying to wake Hannibal up to his presence. He ran his fingers through Hannibal's hair, brushing it back away from his forehead, letting his lips wander around the corner of his jaw and down his throat. Hannibal rested his hands on Will's ribs, then snuck his fingers down to tease up his shirt. Will disengaged long enough to pull it over his head and toss it away, then pressed down hard against Hannibal, rutting himself against the tight black undergarment he'd worn to bed. Hannibal's body had responded so immediately Will had to wonder if he hadn't been anticipating such a visit. "Dreaming about me before I showed up?" he asked.

"Dreaming about me before you decided to come here?" Hannibal asked instead of acknowledging Will's question.

“Is it that obvious?” Will let Hannibal roll on top of him just long enough to get some assistance taking the rest of his clothes off before regaining his original position. He pressed himself against Hannibal again, slowly thrusting over the cloth that still separated them, bringing his mouth back to Hannibal’s neck once more, working his tongue over the same artery Hannibal had threatened to open a few moments earlier, feeling the pulse with his lips. The pressure of that blood would make the loveliest arterial spray, opening in sudden color like flowers that only bloomed at night.

Kiss, or kill?

As if the two weren’t mutually exclusive from time to time.

Hannibal arched up against him, tilting his chin back to give Will better access to his neck, which was not firmly in his best interest. Will ignored the temptation to bite and tear and instead drew his tongue along Hannibal’s left clavicle bone, tasting sweetness, a hint of salt. Hannibal circled his arms around Will and grasped hungrily at his ribs and shoulderblade.

“Hands… where I can see them,” Will ordered through a half-smile. “Been awhile since I said that.”

Hannibal obliged with an expression of equal, if not greater, good nature, letting go of Will and dropping his wrists back against the bed. Will gathered them over his head with one hand and lowered to draw his lips, then tongue, then teeth over one nipple, then the other, rewarded with their sudden attention, and a demanding depth to Hannibal’s breathing. This only increased as Will continued his tease, long, slow grinds, intermittent kisses that never lingered.

“Will.” Hannibal tried to break out of his grasp. When Will didn’t let go, he forced the issue. Will reared back on his knees as Hannibal reached under the pillow again, half-expecting there to somehow be another knife. But it was only the bottle that Hannibal pressed into his grip, folding his hands around it as well. “I want you to take what you came here for. If, indeed, that’s why you came.”

“Don’t trust me?” Will said it playfully through a chuckle, but Hannibal’s silence brought a chilling effect. Will nodded, a numb ache suddenly clawing at his heart. *You shouldn’t. You absolutely shouldn’t. Because when the time comes, I don’t know what I’m going to do.*

I don’t know.

When the fox hears the rabbit scream, he will come running.

To help?

Or to rend and tear and stain the snow with blood?

I don’t know what I’m going to do, and he knows I haven’t decided. Can’t decide. Won’t know until the moment comes.

Will rolled off of him and opened the bedside drawer once more, picking up the knife. He flipped it and held the blade, offering Hannibal the hilt. Hannibal propped himself up on his elbows and looked at the offering with a mix of suspicion and soft hope.

Will motioned with the knife, nodding his head, and Hannibal lifted it gently from his grasp. “You can hold it if you need to,” Will told him.

Hannibal held his gaze for several long moments, the only sound their breaths mellowing in the quiet dark, the whisper of traffic outside, the delicate cadence of a small spit of rain on the window. Then he turned, and tossed the knife off the side of the bed. It landed on the carpet with a dull thud, lost in the shadows. Hannibal put his hand behind Will’s head, twining his fingers in the curls there, and sat up further to bring their lips together. The kiss was hesitant for several seconds, and Will let Hannibal set the pace. He was rewarded as the heat between them intensified, pushing them to the boiling point.

Will disengaged long enough to pull Hannibal’s undergarment free and out of their way, then chased his hand around the rumpled bed covers for the bottle, which he found momentarily. He anointed his hand and began a patient litany of touches over the tenderest areas, those most delicious and secret that elicited a response that was more than enthusiastic. A finger, two, a kiss, now three, his pressure increasing in minuscule increments.

“Now?”

“Yes.”

Will gathered himself and his resolve and pushed in. Hannibal’s eyes fell shut as he dropped his head back, mouth open and inviting. Will made love to him face to face, as they’d done before, though the polarity had reversed. Hannibal spilled against his stomach when Will leaned over to threaten his neck with his teeth, the right combination of friction, the position change, and, perhaps, the wanton thrill of Will’s dangerous nature.

The first time, he’d been hesitant. But tonight, now, on the precipice, staring down chaos, in this room with the only person who had ever really known him, Will didn’t feel hesitant, didn’t concern himself with performance or appearance, left behind any ego. Looking down at Hannibal, all he felt was the connection, the beautiful, tight warmth, those eyes looking up at him, the taste of that mouth and tongue through which had spilled a thousand beautiful words, half of them lies, the other half making life worth living. So much blood on those hands, hands that now caressed his shoulders and back, sometimes the side of his face, fingers playing with his hair. The paradox was a punishment that felt deeply unfair and simultaneously perfect.

And as Hannibal peaked again beneath him, and said his name, he was done for, lost in the cascade.

He could do nothing but collapse at that moment, panting, and he fell into Hannibal’s arms, the place of greatest safety and greatest peril. In the rain-strewn, comforting dark, Will waited, eyes closed, for clarity.

It didn’t come.

He was sure that he loved Hannibal, that he was never more himself than when they were together. He knew he was a killer, and would only ever find peace here, in these arms. He was capable of great, destructive evil, and found it beautiful. But he was also aware of the persistent truth that while they played at godhood, they had no right to decide who lived and who died. They both deserved to spend the rest of their lives in prison, if only to protect future victims that might cross their path.

Like Jack Crawford.

Will was no closer to making a decision.

Hannibal had once told him that he didn't care about lives outside of Will's, didn't care about the future victims he might protect or the people he might save.

I care about your life.

The more Will thought about it, the more wanted to embrace the great selfishness that all gods enjoyed. If he considered it long enough, the faceless silhouettes in his mind, the future lives saved, were ultimately meaningless to him.

But there were tiny shards of him, buried deep inside, diamonds in a coal mine, that were persistent. And they stubbornly remained, despite love, spitting in its face. *You both deserve justice.*

Perhaps, he thought, what Hannibal deserved was a *warning* that things were not what they seemed. Whether or not he perceived it, or took it to heart, was up to him.

"Will."

He lifted his head from Hannibal's chest and looked at him. Hannibal ran his hand through Will's hair, tracing the back of his fingers across his forehead and down his cheek.

"Should we draw a bath?"

"Shower's fine," Will said, easing himself off of Hannibal and letting him slide out of bed. "I, uh, shouldn't stay."

"Best to slip away under the cover of darkness." Hannibal went to the bathroom and flipped on a soft set of lights, stepping into the shower and turning on the water. Will waited a few moments, letting his eyes traverse this room, further memorizing it. He never knew which time would be the last. There would, of course, be a last time. Because either way things went, there would come a time where they would never make love in this bedroom again.

He got up and joined Hannibal in the shower. They were quiet, meditative, washing each other in tandem, the tender actions the aftermath of affection. Hannibal paused to kiss the bullet scar on Will's arm, the flesh reminder of what had happened to Abigail. In turn, Will worked his lips against one of Hannibal's wrist scars, then the other, acknowledging the lasting imprint of Matthew Brown and Will's past deceptions.

They got out, dried off, still not speaking. Will retrieved his clothes from various places around the room and put them on while Hannibal slid into his robe and combed his hair. They met again on the bed, sinking into each other's arms on top of the smoothed duvet.

Will studied Hannibal's expression, catching what he could in the dim lighting. "You seem sad," he said, at last breaking the silence.

"A simple word to describe something as complicated as sorrow can be," Hannibal replied.

"Are you thinking about things we'll… be leaving behind?"

"Our wake, yes." Will could only speculate, but he thought Hannibal chose that particular word specifically for its double meaning. "I visited Bella Crawford today. We spoke of forgiveness."

"Has she forgiven you, then?" Will propped himself up on one elbow, letting the other hand rest against Hannibal's chest, having snuck it between the folds of the robe. He was momentarily desperate to feel the warmth, the pulse beneath his ribs.

"She has. But it was not a conscious choice. She let go of her anger because she knows her time is short. Almost a natural reflex, like blinking or breathing." Hannibal reached up to fold his palm against Will's cheek, and Will leaned into the touch, as he always did. "I felt an affinity with her situation. Counting days down until the sun sets on life."

"Are you sick?" Will demanded, his voice suddenly loud, edged with fear.

"I only mean the death of this life. Unlike Bella, we have the guarantee of a new life waiting for us, if we choose."

"I haven't been, ah, letting myself think too much about her," Will admitted, resting his head against Hannibal's chest now, one ear keen on his heartbeat. "It seems… *unnatural* that she should outlive Jack."

"We'll be accused of a particular cruelty," Hannibal agreed. "Forcing her to endure her final days knowing Jack met his end at our hand."

"After you insisted on saving her life, despite what she wanted," Will added as Hannibal played with his hair, running a fingertip over the curve of his ear.

"I didn't insist." Hannibal turned them gently so he could lean over Will, looking him in the eyes. God, it had been such a long time since he couldn't even make eye contact with people, Hannibal no less. "I left it to chance. I had an equal desire to honor her wishes, and to disrupt her plan to deny Jack a proper goodbye." Hannibal paused, running the pad of his thumb across Will's lower lip. "I let a coin decide."

"You decided to save someone's life… based on a *coin toss* ?" Will couldn't help the incredulity in his voice.

"How would you have decided?"

Will opened his mouth to reply, then closed it. Opened it again. “I don’t know,” he admitted at last.

“I imagine, at times, God does the same.” Hannibal leaned his head against his hand, resting his other on Will’s abdominals. Will closed his fingers over it. “He may very well suffer the same indecision that challenges us from time to time.” He looked at Will pointedly while his mouth pronounced the word *indecision.* Will forced himself to hold the gaze, making his features as open and, dare he think it, innocent as possible.

“Makes as much sense as anything else about God,” Will shrugged, tucking his arm behind his head.

“And embracing that universal chaos is what can make us truly free.” Hannibal leaned in to kiss him, just a taste. “We’ll be free of many things soon.”

Will sighed, looking up at the ceiling. The rain had started again, making watery shadows out of moonlight. “I wish the coin had landed on the other side. I don’t like… thinking about that moment. When someone will come to tell her. She’ll be sick from the treatment, or-or having trouble b-breathing, and some agent’ll walk into her room and say, uh, ‘we’re very sorry, Mrs. Crawford, but your husband…’” He shook his head, not meeting Hannibal’s gaze.

“You want to spare her this pain.”

“I wish we could.”

Hannibal considered in a brief silence. “We could walk away. The preparations are complete. It’d mean a simple call to the airline to change reservations.”

“That’s the second time you’ve… suggested we should leave before having Jack for dinner,” Will mused, half of his mind willing his heart to hold steady. This was dangerously delicate. “Are you having second thoughts?”

“Bella’s forgiveness has planted a seed,” Hannibal told him. “Perhaps, when faced with the sun setting on a life, forgiveness is a natural consequence.” He smiled gently. “Think of it, Will. Within weeks, we could be sitting at a café in the Piazza del Duomo in Florence, enjoying an amaro before taking in an opera at the Teatro Della Pergola. Use your imagination – picture us in Paris, Will, wandering the banks of the Seine, stealing kisses beneath its bridges.”

Will smiled, reflexive and genuine. Then it fell away. “You might be in a place to forgive Jack, to, ah, ignore his compulsion for justice. But you know he’ll never stop looking. Especially after Bella’s gone.”

“He won’t be the only one. We must be clever, regardless.”

Will took a breath and then pressed his lips together, his heart submerging into cold, black waters. “What if *I’m* not interested in forgiveness?”

Hannibal’s brows climbed a few degrees higher. “You want retribution?”

“When I was sick,” Will said, his voice calm but sharp-edged, “when my brain was on fire and I was so very clearly, obviously… *publicly* losing my mind… he still pushed. He pushed and he pushed. He wanted me to catch murderers, and he didn’t care what it did to me until it was too late. Until I was in so deep there was no way I could walk away in good conscience.” He sighed. “Jack *ingrained* the greater good in my mind.”

“He asked to borrow your imagination, then chained it to the FBI,” Hannibal mused.

“I know I had a choice. But it didn’t feel like I did. And wh-when… when Abigail *happened*... he didn’t believe me. Even after everything we’d been through, everything he’d put me through, he didn’t believe me. He chose to-to embrace guilt, and-and responsibility for pushing me *then* , after it mattered.” He laughed, but it was joyless. “He chose *you* , Hannibal. He believed *you* . Maybe because you saved Bella.”

Hannibal ran his fingers along Will’s forehead and into his hair, stroking it back, then leaned in to kiss him. “As always, Will, I’m loath to deny you anything. The dinner will go as planned.”

Will sat up and put his hand over his face a moment, passing his fingers along his brow and indulging in a steadying breath. “And if it doesn’t? Go as planned, I mean.”

“Jack may suspect he’s walking into a trap.”

Will nodded. “Hannibal.” He turned back and slung a leg over Hannibal’s hips, settling in. Hannibal took one of his hands, and held onto his thigh with the other. “Listen. If… if something goes wrong– and s-something happens to me, just… promise me something, okay?” He squeezed Hannibal’s hand, then slowly relaxed his grip. “Promise me you’ll just leave. If anything goes wrong, if you’re going to be caught, or-or killed, I want you to run, you understand me?”

“Will.” His name, simple, but the tone revealed what it was. Hannibal’s way of asking him not to give the possibility power by voicing the words aloud.

“I think,” Will said, ignoring it, “if they put me back in the Baltimore State Hospital, or they stick me on Death Row, or if Jack shoots me – I can bear all of that if I know you got away.”

“Will.” Hannibal’s voice was firmer now, the hand on Will’s thigh caressing, soothing. “We’re leaving together.”

“But–”

“We’re leaving together,” Hannibal insisted. “You’ll see.”

See?

See?

... and CUT!

Now start the episode again. And get ready for… the Big Sad. Will gives Hannibal his warning of the betrayal by deliberately visiting a very living Freddie Lounds, getting her scent on him for Hannibal to smell later as they burn Hannibal's files and notes. Kade Prurnell gets wind of Jack and Will's plan, and issues a warrant for Will's arrest and orders Hannibal brought in. Out of time, Will rushes to Hannibal's house to find that Jack went over as soon as he heard about the warrants to battle Hannibal on his own. Alana, worried about Jack and Will, also hurries over, confronting Hannibal as he tries to break down the pantry door to finish Jack off. He tells her to walk away or he'll kill her. She ends up pushed out a window by none other than Abigail Hobbs who is still alive. Evading the authorities has delayed Will and he arrives only after all the shit's gone down.

"You were supposed to leave…"

"We couldn't leave without you…"

Hannibal slits Abigail's throat in front of a gutted Will and flees Baltimore in the rain.

That's it for Season 2! All my love to the readers who take the time to leave kudos and comments and encouragement. The plan is to finish season 3 and include an epilogue, because I promised some of you that they end up together post-fall. After that, I may do season 4, or expand out into some AU work, it depends what the people want, because I'm happy doing anything.

If you are reading this, you are a bright spot in a world that is otherwise darkening, day by day it seems. Lots of love, and I'll see you next season!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!